Hinduism has always been an environmentally sensitive philosophy. No religion, perhaps, lays as much emphasis on environmental ethics as Hinduism. The Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas and Smriti contain the earliest messages for preservation of environment and ecological balance. Nature, or Earth, has never been considered a hostile element to be conquered or dominated. In fact, man is forbidden from exploiting nature. He is taught to live in harmony with nature and recognize that divinity prevails in all elements, including plants and animals. The rishis of the past have always had a great respect for nature. Theirs was not a superstitious primitive theology. They perceived that all material manifestations are a shadow of the spiritual. The Bhagavad Gita advises us not to try to change the environment, improve it, or wrestle with it. If it seems hostile at times tolerate it. Ecology is an inherent part of a spiritual world view in Hinduism.

According to Swami B. V. Tripurari, in his book, **Ancient Wisdom for Modern Ignorance**, " Our present environmental crisis is in essence a spiritual crisis. We need only to look back to medieval Europe and the psychic revolution that vaulted Christianity to victory over paganism to find the spirit of the environmental crisis. Inhibitions to the exploitation of nature vanished as the Church took the "spirits" out of the trees, mountains, and seas. Christianity's ghost-busting theology made it possible for man to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. It made nature man's monopoly. This materialist paradigm has dominated the modern world for last few centuries. The current deplorable condition demands a spiritual response. A fundamental reorientation of human consciousness, accompanied by action that is born out of inner commitment, is very much needed. One of the measures that could help a great deal to fulfill this need is to regenerate and rejuvenate basic values of Hindu culture and propagate them."

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi observed: **"I bow my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in nature and for their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of Nature with a religious significance."**

(source: **Glimpses of Indian Culture - By Dr. Giriraj Shah** p. 106).

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Hinduism has often been coined as a "environmental friendly" religion. Hindus regard everything around them as pervaded by a **subtle divine presence**, may it be rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, flora, the mineral world, as well as the stars and planets. It is so because the Divine reality is present as Prana/Shakti energy, power, in every electron, particle, atom, cell and in every manifestation of matter. It is its very fabric. Just like the



sparks of a fire are of the same essence as the fire they were issued forth from, so is the entire creation, of the same essence as the Divine. Just as Hindus greet each other saying "Namaste", which means: I recognize and salute the Divine within you, so do they recognize the same Divine essence, in all around them.

Ayurveda, the **science of life**, which is a complete health and medicine system based on nature and its regenerating forces. Then we have **Vastu Shastra**, upon which the now well-known Feng Shui is based. Vastu, teaches us how to place and build dwellings, according to the environment it is situated in. It is done in such a way that the surroundings are not damaged by the building's presence, and so that all the natural energies are flowing uninterrupted and freely, providing comfort, peace and prosperity for the dwellers.

Another facet of Hinduism's environmental concern is to do with food is a very physical example: **vegetarianism**. Typically, Hindu social thought has always included an ecological dimension. Socialism and liberalism do not have this dimension, they can at best annex it. But it is an organic part of Hindu dharma.

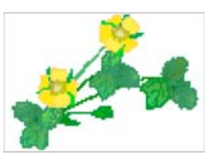
(source: **Hinduism and Environment** - hinduchatzone.com).

Throughout the long history of India, Hindus have shared a fascination with, and respect for, Nature and animals.

This attitude went beyond the usefulness. It had to do with reverence for all of God's creation. Our ancestors worshipped trees, rivers, birds and stones and connected to the universal principle through Shiva. As we are growing more materialistic, we are losing this connection. **Our ancestors saw Nature as being a manifestation of God. There was, therefore, a gratitude towards nature.**

The tradition of maintaining sacred groves and sacred trees vanished from most countries, due mainly to the rise of dogmatic religions like Christianity and Islam, which advocated faith in one god and were explicitly for the eradication of 'pagan' practices. The underlying theme in Semitic religions is that of a chosen people who have been divinely granted ownership of the earth and all living things, and permission to exploit them. The Semitic perception that humans have more "dignity" than animals has gone a long way into the enormous decimation and extinction of non-human life on our planet not to mention the massacre of non-believing human beings. Hindu philosophy has always had a humane and dignified view of the sacredness of all life, and that humans are but one link in the symbiotic chain of life and consciousness.

According to **Guy Sorman**, visiting scholar at Hoover Institution at Stanford and the leader of new liberalism in France, author of **The Genius of India** (Macmillan India Ltd. 2001. ISBN 0333 93600 0) says:



"The Indian tradition, on the other hand, is that men submit to nature and form part of it, there nature preserves its sacredness, lost in the West since the Industrial Revolution." He further states that the idea of feminism and **ecology came from the 1968 movement, from the meeting between India and the West.** He says: **"There is hardly anything in European thought to predispose the West to reject virility, the respect for authority, the mastery over nature.** India too has a warrior (khastriya) tradition of virility as exemplified in the **Mahabharata**, only it is secondary. First, comes the veneration of thousands of goddesses - for the Indians, India is above all **Mother India.** India's femininity and sexual ambiguity, is the very antithesis of Western virility. For example, when the British scaled earth's highest peak, the exploit was widely hailed as the **"conquest of the Everest."** It was not realized and is often not realized still, that the word "conquest" was totally out of place in the context of the peak which is considered an object of reverence by many. One does not "conquer" nature. Nature humors at times, man's curiosity. Conquest is, therefore, an irreverent word."

Helen Ellerbe has written: "**In the West, Christianity has distanced humanity from Nature.** As people came to perceive God as a singular supremacy detached from the physical world, **they lost their reverence for nature.** In Christian eyes, the physical world became the realm of the devil. A society that had once celebrated nature through seasonal **pagan festivals** began to commemorate biblical events bearing no connection to the earth. Holidays lost much of the celebratory spirit and took on a tone of penance and sorrow. **Time once**

thought to be cyclical like the seasons, was now perceived to be linear. In their rejection of the cyclical nature of life, orthodox Christians came to focus more upon death than upon life. **Francis Bacon**, (1561-1626) said: "Nature was to be bound into service and made a 'slave and 'put in constraint.' In short, nature was to be conquered, not enjoyed and certainly not revered. Nature is to be revered and befriended. 'Paganism' was a term of contempt invented by Christianity for people in the countryside who lived close to and in harmony with Nature, and whose ways of worship were spontaneous as opposed to the contrived though-categories constructed by Christianity's city-based manipulators of human minds.

(source: **The Dark Side of Christian History - By Helen Ellerbe** p.139 - 155).

(**Note**: **The Rapture and the Environment** - Many Christian fundamentalists feel that concern for the **future of our planet is irrelevant, because it has no future.** They believe we are living in the End Time, when the son of God will return, the righteous will enter heaven, and sinners will be condemned to eternal hellfire. They may also believe, along with millions of other Christian fundamentalists, that **environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded but actually welcomed -- even hastened -- as a sign of the coming Apocalypse.** **Bill Moyers** received an environmental award from **Harvard University**. He said: "**James Watt** told the U.S. Congress that protecting natural resources was unimportant in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. In public testimony he said, 'After the last tree is felled, Christ will come back.' - sources: **Battlefield Earth - By Bill Moyers** and **The Godly Must Be Crazy - By Glen Scherer** and **Rapture or Rupture? - By Bryan Zepp Jamieson**).

Forrrest G Wood (?) an author has written: "**Christianity believed that God gave man dominion over all the earth.** The popularity in the 19th century of pre- and post-millennial sects – which held that Christ will return one day, believers will ascend to heaven in the **"rapture,"** and the world will end – easily led to a diminished regard for the physical environment. All this is very different in most of the polytheistic world, where man is considered to be merely one of many beings who survived and, indeed, prospered not because he subdued the forces of his natural environment but because he harmonized with them. To the Hindu, whose veneration of living things are the foundation of his faith."

(source: **Arrogance of Faith - By Forrrest G Wood** p. 116 - 117 and 231).

Betty Heimann (?) late professor of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy at Ceylon University, has said: **"While the West has proclaimed man's uniqueness as a thinking and planning creature, propagating and promoting his domination over the natural world and his unique capacity for cultural development and historical progress, Indians, have never tried to separate him from the natural world and the unity of life: "No human hybris, self-elevation and self-deceit, can here develop, where man is but another expression of Nature's all-embracing forces."**

(source: **Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought - By Wilhelm Halbfass** p. 265 - 267).

Animism (used by the colonial British in India) was another disparaging term, used to denote the worship of spirits and forces of nature as opposed to a 'true' (Monotheistic) god. This bias persists in Western thought to this day, and rather than being debunked as a phoney concept, it is still widely used to describe non-Abrahamic faiths.



Balrama seated with snake hood. bronze. 8th-9th century.

The mighty serpent Sesha, on whom Lord Vishnu rests during the intervals of creation, is reputedly a form of the god himself (Sesha-Narayana), though he is also identified as Balarama (Baladeva), elder brother of Lord Krishna. Animism was another disparaging term, coined by the Colonial British in India, used to denote the worship of spirits and forces of nature as opposed to a 'true' (monotheistic) God.

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Mahatma Gandhi bemoaned: **"We were strangers to this sort of classification – animists, aborigines, etc., but we have learnt from the English rulers.**" When the missionary Dr. Chesterman queried if this objection applied to the 'animist' aboriginal races of the Kond hills, Gandhi insisted, **"Yes, it does apply, because I know that in spite of being described as animists these tribes have from time immemorial been absorbed in Hinduism. They are, like the indigenous medicine, of the soil, and their roots lie deep there."**

(source: **Adi Deo Arya Devata – By Sandhya Jain** p. 2 - 235).

"Man, when he is strong, conquers nature," declared William Lawrence, a Massachusetts Episcopal bishop. Anything that gets in the way will be brushed aside. "Dominion over the earth is the condition of man's residence upon the globe," William Pope Harrison, an editor for the Methodist Church, South, reflected in 1893.

In 1967, a brief but influential article by UCLA History Professor **Lynn White**, Jr. appeared in the magazine, **Science**. Entitled, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis. His astounding thesis that Western religion is one of the roots of the ecological crisis. **In this article, he said that the Western world's attitudes towards nature were shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition (he also included Islam and Marxism within this overall tradition).** He asserts that Western Christianity is, "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." This overemphasis on anthropocentrism gives humans permission to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the integrity of natural objects. White argued that within Christian theology, "nature has no

reason for existence save to serve [humans]." Thus, for White, Christian arrogance towards nature "bears a huge burden of guilt" for the contemporary environmental crisis. **By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. In older religious traditions, humans were seen as part of nature, rather than the ruler of nature. And in animistic religions, there was believed to be a spirit in every tree, mountain or spring, and all had to be respected. In contrast with paganism and Eastern religions, Christianity "not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."**

(source: **Religion and Environment**).

Kewal Motwani (1899 -) author of several books including **Science and Society in India** has observed:

"Unity between nature and man - **The civilization of India had its birth in the bosom of Mother Nature.** At the time when her history began, India was a land of vast forests. Those forests not only administered to the daily needs of the people, giving them shelter from heat of the sun and ravages to storms, green pastures for cattle and abundant fuel for sacrificial and architectural purposes, but they also made a permanent impression on the minds of the people. **Their religion had no aggressive frontiers**; no walls of brick and mortar set people apart from one another. The people lived in one vast embrace of nature, as one family. **There was no "divide and rule" mentality, no aggressive, ruthless exploitation of nature,** no assertive individualism which has been the characteristic of civilizations nurtured within the city walls. There was harmony within and without, and inward realization of the Eternal became dominant aspiration of people's lives. **There was an attitude of identification, not conflict, a search of the One, not of the many."**

(source: **India: A synthesis of cultures – by Kewal Motwani** p. 47).

According **Dr. David Frawley** eminent teacher and practitioner of Ayurvedic medicine:

"No religion, perhaps, lays as much emphasis on environmental ethics as does Hinduism. It believes in ecological responsibility and says like Native Americans that the Earth is our mother. It champions protection of animals, which it considers also have souls, and promotes vegetarianism. It has a strong tradition of non-violence or ahimsa. It believes that God is present in all nature, in all creatures, and in every human being regardless of their faith or lack of it."

In the ancient spiritual traditions, man was looked upon as part of nature, linked by the indissoluble spiritual and psychological bonds to the elements around him. This is very much marked in the Hindu tradition, the oldest living religious tradition in the world. The Vedas, the oldest hymns composed by great spiritual seers and thinkers which are the repository of Hindu wisdom, reflect the vibrancy of an encompassing world-view which looks upon all objects in the universe, living or non-living, as being pervaded by the same spiritual power. Hinduism believes in the all-encompassing sovereignty of the divine, manifesting itself in a graded scale of evolution. The human race, though at the top of the evolutionary pyramid at present, is not seen as something apart from the earth and its multitudinous life forms.



A Hindu woman performing a religious ceremony around the tulsi plant
Painting by D.V. Dhurandhar, Bombay, C.1890 (courtesy V&A Museum, London).

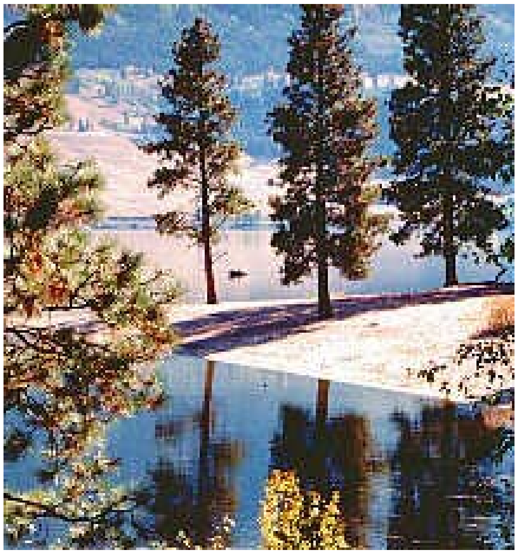
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Our natural environment – comprising mountains and hills, rivers and dales, trees and plants – is considered **auspicious enough to provide space for meditation**. There are thousands of spots whose special sanctity is enhanced by the performance of daily rituals. Retreats in the Himalayas or on the river banks shelter sages who are credited with universal knowledge. Especially hallowed are the sources and confluence of rivers. Harmony with the natural world receives strong emphasis as a pervasive element in Indian spiritual beliefs and rituals. Evergreen trees were regarded as symbols of eternal life and to cut them down was to invite the wrath of the gods. Groves in forests were looked upon as habitations of the gods. It was under a banyan tree that the Hindu sages sat in a trance seeking enlightenment and it was here that they held discourses and conducted holy rituals.

The ancient sacred literature of the Vedas enshrines a holistic and poetic cosmic vision. They represent the oldest, the most carefully nurtured, the most elaborately systematized and the most lovingly preserved oral tradition in the annals of the world. Unique in their perspective of time and space, their evocative poetry is a joyous and spontaneous affirmation of life and nature. The Vedic Hymn to the Earth, the *Prithvi Sukta* in *Atharva Veda,* is unquestionably the oldest and the most evocative environmental invocation. In it, the Vedic seer solemnly declares the enduring filial allegiance of humankind to Mother Earth: '*Mata Bhumih Putroham Prithivyah*: Earth is my mother, I am her son.' Mother Earth is celebrated for all her natural bounties and particularly for her gifts of herbs and vegetation. Her blessings are sought for prosperity in all endeavours and fulfilment of all righteous aspirations. A covenant is made that humankind shall secure the Earth against all environmental trespass and shall never let her be oppressed. A soul-stirring prayer is sung in one of the hymns for the preservation and conservation of hills, snow-clad mountains, and all brown, black and red earth, unhurt, unsmitten, unwounded, unbroken and well defended by Indra.

(source: **The East is green -** ourplanet.com).

The **Artha-Veda** has the magnificent **Hymn to the Earth (Bhumi-Sukta)** which is redolent with ecological and environmental values.



“Earth, in which lie the sea, the river and other waters,
in which food and cornfields have come to be,
in which lives all that breathes and that moves,
may she confer on us the finest of her yield.
Earth, in which the waters, common to all,
moving on all sides, flow unfailingly, day and night,
may she pour on us milk in many streams,
and endow us with luster,
May those born of thee, O Earth,
be of our welfare, free from sickness and waste,
wakeful through a long life, we shall become bearers of tribute to thee.
Earth, my mother, set me securely with bliss in full accord with heaven,
O wise one, uphold me in grace and splendor.”

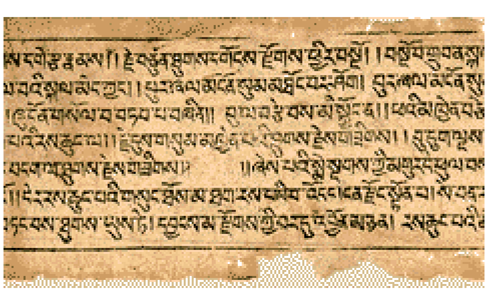
Not only in the Vedas, but in later scriptures, such as the Upanishads, the Puranas and subsequent texts, the Hindu viewpoint on nature has been clearly enunciated. It is permeated by a reverence for all life, and an awareness that the great forces of nature – the earth, the sky, the air, the water and fire – as well as various orders of life including plants, trees, forests and animals, are all bound to each other within the great rhythms of nature. The divine is not exterior to creation, but expresses itself through natural phenomena.

Thus, in the **Mudaka Upanishad** **the divine** is described as follows:

“Fire is head, his eyes are the moon and the sun;
The regions of space are his ears, his voice the revealed Veda,
The wind is his breadth, his heart is the entire universe,
The earth is his footstool,
Truly he is the inner soul of all.”

India is a vast network of sacred places. There are seven sacred rivers, seven sacred mountains, sacred trees and plants, sacred cities. The sacrality of the land of India, gives a sense of unity to this country of so many religions, cultures, races and languages.

The Indian tradition is strongly cosmocentric, where man lives as part of a system in which everything is related to everything else. Creation and destruction take place simultaneously. Materials and energy move from organism to organism. Matter is arranged in precise order in every organism, but in death this order is followed by disorder: cycling of materials through organisms brings order once again. But today, rapidly drifting from our traditions of sustainable use and coexistence, we seem to be entering a man-centered world that implies the decimation of nature.



The **Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas and Smriti** **contain the earliest messages for preservation of environment and ecological balance. Nature, or Earth, has never been considered a hostile element to be conquered or dominated.** In fact, man is forbidden from exploiting nature. He is taught to live in harmony with nature and recognize that divinity prevails in all elements, including plants and animals.

Atman, the world-soul, is the whole world. **God is in all things,**

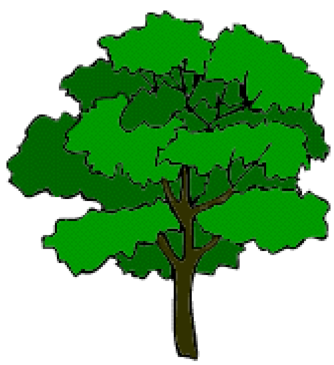
and all things are in God.

The **Mahabharata** hints that the basic elements of nature constitute the Cosmic Being -- the mountains His bones, the earth His flesh, the sea His blood, the sky His abdomen, the air His breath and agni (fire) His energy. **The whole emphasis of the ancient Hindu scriptures is that human beings cannot separate themselves from natural surroundings and Earth has the same relationship with man as the mother with her child.** Planting and preservation of trees are made sacred in religious functions.

Ancient India sanctified plants, animals as a recognition of biodiversity.

The **Rig Veda is a celebration of nature**, its hero the God of Rain. Dawn was beautiful Ushas, dressed in a veil of light crimson, whose dancing appearance is heralded with the fragrance of the flowers. The lotus, said **Kalidasa**, welcomes the touch of the sun. The beautiful Chola temple at Gangaikondacholapuram in Tamilnadu contains a rare and exquisite representation of Surya in a navagraha stone - a lotus encircled by the planets. **But the greatest tribute to the sun was at Konarak, the giant chariot reflecting the Sun God in all his glory.**

In a sculpture in the rock-cut cave temple of Bhaja (2nd century B.C.) Surya, in his chariot, destroys the demon of darkness. Surya is invariably depicted in a chariot driven by seven horses representing the seven days, encircled by a halo, and wearing boots, for his feet could scorch the earth!



Animals were revered too. Kamadhenu was the wish-fulfilling cow, whose offspring are all the cattle on earth. The word "go" or cow was very important: gopura was the entrance to the village, gotra was the clan to which a person belonged, goshti was an assembly of good men, gosarga and godhuli represented dawn and dusk, while gopa and govalla were officials. Krishna even lifts Mount Govardhana to save cattle from Indra's wrath, a recurring theme in Indian art. **But the greatest honour given to animals was their elevation as the vehicles of the gods,** and as the incarnations of Vishnu, roles that are repeated in sculpture and painting. Shiva rode the bull, Vishnu the eagle, Brahma the swan, and so on.

By recognizing the five elements that were essential for life and elevating every species of plant and animal to sanctity, Ancient Indians recognized and respected the importance of biodiversity. **By secularizing rivers and lands, plants and animals, they were scientifically correct.** But today people pollute and destroy with impunity. The earth and its bounties are sacred creations. Unless we revere them and revive a respect for their sanctity, we have little chance of saving them.

(source: **Grounded in wisdom - by Nanditha Krishna - newindpress.com**).

Our scriptures warn, **"Oh wicked persons! If you roast a bird, then your bathing in sacred rivers, pilgrimage, worship and yagnas are useless."** In our ancient stories, birds and animals have always been identified with gods and goddesses.
The **Padmapurana** warns: **"A person who is engaged in killing creatures, polluting wells, and ponds and tanks, and destroying gardens, certainly goes to hell." Padmapurana, Bhoomikhanda** 96.7-8

"The purchaser of flesh performs himsa (violence) by his wealth; he who eats flesh does so by enjoying its taste; the killer does himsa by actually tying and killing the animal. Thus, there are three forms of killing: he who brings flesh or sends for it, he who cuts off the limbs of an animal, and he who purchases, sells or cooks flesh and eats it - all of these are to be considered meat-eaters." - **Mahabharata**

Welfare of all creatures: The Vedantic concept is that of the welfare of all creation, not only of human beings but also of what we call the lower creatures.

Dr. Karan Singh states:

"**In our arrogance and ignorance we have destroyed the environment of this planet. We have polluted the oceans, we have made the air unbreathable, we have desecrated nature and decimated wildlife. But the Vedantic seers knew that man was not something apart from nature,**

and, therefore, they constantly exhort us that, while we work for own salvation, we must also work for the welfare of all beings."

(source: **Essays in Hinduism - By Dr. Karan Singh** p. 47).

David Frawley, American eminent teacher and practitioner of Ayurvedic medicine and Vedic astrology and author of several books considers **Hinduism to be a religion of the Earth**, because, as he describes beautifully:

"…i**t honors the Earth as the Divine Mother and encourages us to honor her and help her develop her creative potentials. The deities of Hinduism permeate the world of nature…they don't belong to a single country or book only. It is not necessary to live in India to be a Hindu. In fact, one must live in harmony with the land where one is located to be a true Hindu.**

"I see Hinduism as a religion eminently suited for all lands and for all people because it requires that we connect with the land and its creatures - that we align our individual self with the soul of all beings around us. **Hinduism finds holy places everywhere, wherever there is a river, a mountain, a large rock, or big tree, wherever some unusual natural phenomenon be it a spring, a cave, or a geyser."**

(source: **The need for a new Indic school of thought**).

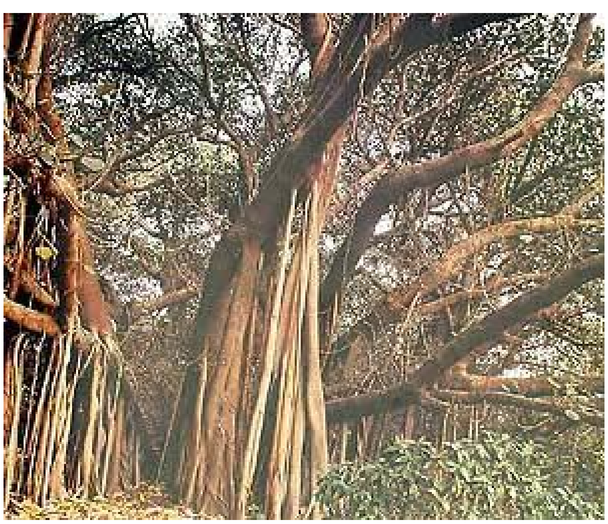
Manu the Hindu law giver was vehemently pro-environment. Denuding, polluting, or other wise damaging the environment was considered such a serious offense in Hinduism a person could be excommunicated for killing trees!.

(source: **The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism - By Linda Johnsen** p. 229).

Hindus have worshipped trees, we have tied sacred threads around them, we have taken shelter under them, have held social ceremonies around these, offered these water, milk and sometimes even cowdung. Development destroys trees, these are often chopped mercilessly, and the eternal search for firewood threatens their limbs.

We have worshipped the trees long before ecology became fashionable in the West.

A quote from **Vishnu Purana** states::



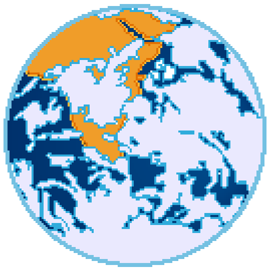
"As the wide-spreading nargodha (Sanskrit for banyan) tree is compressed in a small seed,
So at the time of dissolution, the whole universe is comprehended in Thee as its germ;
as the nargodha germinates from the seed, and becomes just a shoot and then rises into loftiness, so the created world proceeds from Thee and expands into magnitude."

The **Varah Purana** says, "One who plants one peepal, one neem, one bar, ten flowering plants or creepers, two pomegranates, two oranges and five mangos, does not go to hell."

In the **Charak Sanhita**, destruction of forests is taken as destruction of the state, and reforestation an act of rebuilding the state and advancing its welfare. Protection of animals is considered a sacred duty.

An Indian's relation with nature differs from that of a Western man. In the West, man has separated himself from nature, mastered it, he believes, and used it to serve his own purpose. Love of animals and of nature in the West is a personal attitude, not a natural law. **As the vine embraces, the tree, and could not live without it, so the Hindu unites himself with nature. From nature he came; to nature he returns, as ashes. The relationship between a Hindu and nature is one of adaptation and coexistence rather than of mastery and subjection.**

"As the curtain of the new millennium rises, the drama of life and humans seems tragic. More than six billion people are on a march of materialism, which means that acquisition, accumulation, possessions and consumption of material goods is the ultimate "good" of life. The philosophy assumes that the material resources are unlimited. Human beings are proliferating at the rate of 80 million a year and 90% of the growth is in the developing world. There, almost four out of ten people live at the edge of survival. In India alone, 320 million out of one billion are living marginally. It is not until 2100, according to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), that the Earth's population may stabilize at 10.5 to 11 billion people.



The Earth is endangered, according to a warning from the Union of Concerned Scientists in December 1992. A declared report states that: "Most biological systems, which have sustained life on the planet for millions of years, will collapse some time during the early part of the next century." Everywhere, the human spirit is in revolt. Extinction cannot be the future of this beautiful Earth. The perversion of technological systems must be challenged--a society on the march towards doom must accept the wisdom of the ancients that all life is sacred and its existence rests on the harmony established by evolution in the total scheme of life."

(source: **Hinduism Today - July/August 2000** p 20-23).

The current deplorable condition demands a spiritual response. A fundamental reorientation of human consciousness, accompanied by action that is born out of inner commitment, is very much needed. One of the measures that could help a great deal to fulfill this need is to regenerate and rejuvenate basic values of Hindu culture and propagate them.

(source: **http://www.hindunet.org/alt_hindu/1994/msg00953.html**).

Whatever I dig up of you, O earth,
May you of that have quick replenishment!
O purifying one,
May my thrust never reach
unto your vital points, your heart.
May your dwellings, O earth,
free from sickness and wasting,
flourish for us!
Through a long life watchful,
May we always offer to you our tribute.
— **Atharva Veda**



The ancient Tamil scripture, **Tirukural**, advises in verse 324, "What is the good way? It is the path that reflects on how it may avoid killing any living creature;" and in verse 327, "Refrain from taking precious life from any living being, even to save your own life."

Although Indian philosophers believed that the world goes through a cycle of evolution and decline, it always admonished reverence for life--respect for all forms of life and preservation of biodiversity--a continuation of evolution. The new philosophy of life challenges the arrogance of humans. The Earth is not for humans only. It is for all life--life in its various forms and structures. While individuals have a short and transient existence, evolution continues inexorably. The consciousness and spirits are beyond material existence, beyond time and space. They are eternal, an integral part of Brahman.

The **Rig Veda 1.6.3 states:**

"Nature's beauty is an art of God. Let us feel the touch of God's invisible hands in everything beautiful. By the first touch of His hand rivers throb and ripple. When He smiles the sun shines, the moon glimmers, the stars twinkle, the flowers bloom.

By the first rays of the rising sun, the universe is stirred; the shining gold is sprinkled on the smiling buds of rose; the fragrant air is filled with sweet melodies of singing birds, the dawn is the dream of God's creative fancy."



Mother Earth - Bhudevi - is the consort of Lord Vishnu. She personifies the earth and holds a blue lotus.

A prayer that offers respect to mother Earth and asks for her protection:

“O Mother Earth, the worlds are maintained by you. Oh goddess, you are upheld by Lord Vishnu. Kindly purify this seat and daily maintain me.”

The earth and the sun span the world of human experience. The sun, the ‘eye of God’, gives forth energy and life, fertilizing the earth, who is the mother from whose womb all life-forms are born.

In the Vedic literatures mother Earth is personified as the Goddess Bhumi, or Prithvi. She is the abundant mother who showers her mercy oh her children.

Her beauty and profusion are vividly portrayed in the beautiful Hymn to the Earth in the Arthava Veda from which the following verses are taken:

“Your castles and fortresses are built by divine engineers. In every province of yours people are working hard. You bear all precious things in your womb. May God, the Lord of life, make you pleasing, on all sides." (43)

"O mother, with your oceans, rivers and other bodies of water, you give us land to grow grains, on which our survival depends. Please give us as much milk, fruits, water and cereals as we need to eat and drink.'" (3)

"O mother, bearing folk who speak different languages and follow different religions, treating them all as residents of the same house, please pour, like a cow who never fails, a thousand streams of treasure to enrich me. "44)

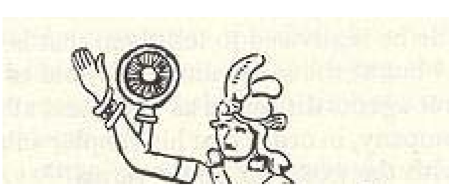
"May you, our motherland, on whom grow wheat, rice and barley, on whom are born five races of mankind, be nourished by the cloud, and loved by the rain." (42).

(source: **Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth - By Ranchor Prime** p. 30 - 31).

Top of Page

Dharma: ecological balance

The king was the administrator of dharma. He was to be guided by this principle of balance, harmonizing relationships between all kingdoms of nature, mineral, vegetable, animal and man, various groups and administrative units. **Dharma was the underlying principle of political, economic and social relations in a state, and this principle was to be extended even to the earth and its products.** We catch a glimpse of this knowledge of ecological balance in the coronation oath which was administered to a king. **Aitareya Brahmana** gives the promise which Purohita took from the king to the following effect:



“Between the night I am born and the night I die whatever good I might have done, my heaven, my life, my progeny, may I be deprived of it, if I oppress you. (Book viii, chapter 4). **Satapatha Brahmana** states that the king should take consent of the earth at the time of the Rajasuya ceremony thus:



“Mother Prithvi (Earth), injure me not, nor I thee.”

It was a bounden duty of the king to see to it that the earth was not subjected to undue strain, her resources not unduly depleted. The earth was the mother, she sustained life with her products.

Somadev in his **Niti Vakyamrita** gives a hymn which it was incumbent upon the king to recite every day:

“I am protecting this cow (earth) which bears the milk of four oceans, whose calf is dharma, whose tail is enterprise (purushartha), whose hoofs are varna and ashrama (four groups and four orders), whose ears are desire and action (karma and artha), whose horns are diplomacy and valor, whose eyes are truth and purity, and whose face is law…I shall not be patient with anyone who injures her.”

This is probably the earliest record in all human history of man’s clear realization of the ecological state to preserve. Nations that have flouted this most significant fact of social life have disappeared and their wrecks lie scattered along the shores of history. India knew this principle and honored it in practice.

Place of nature in Indian literature

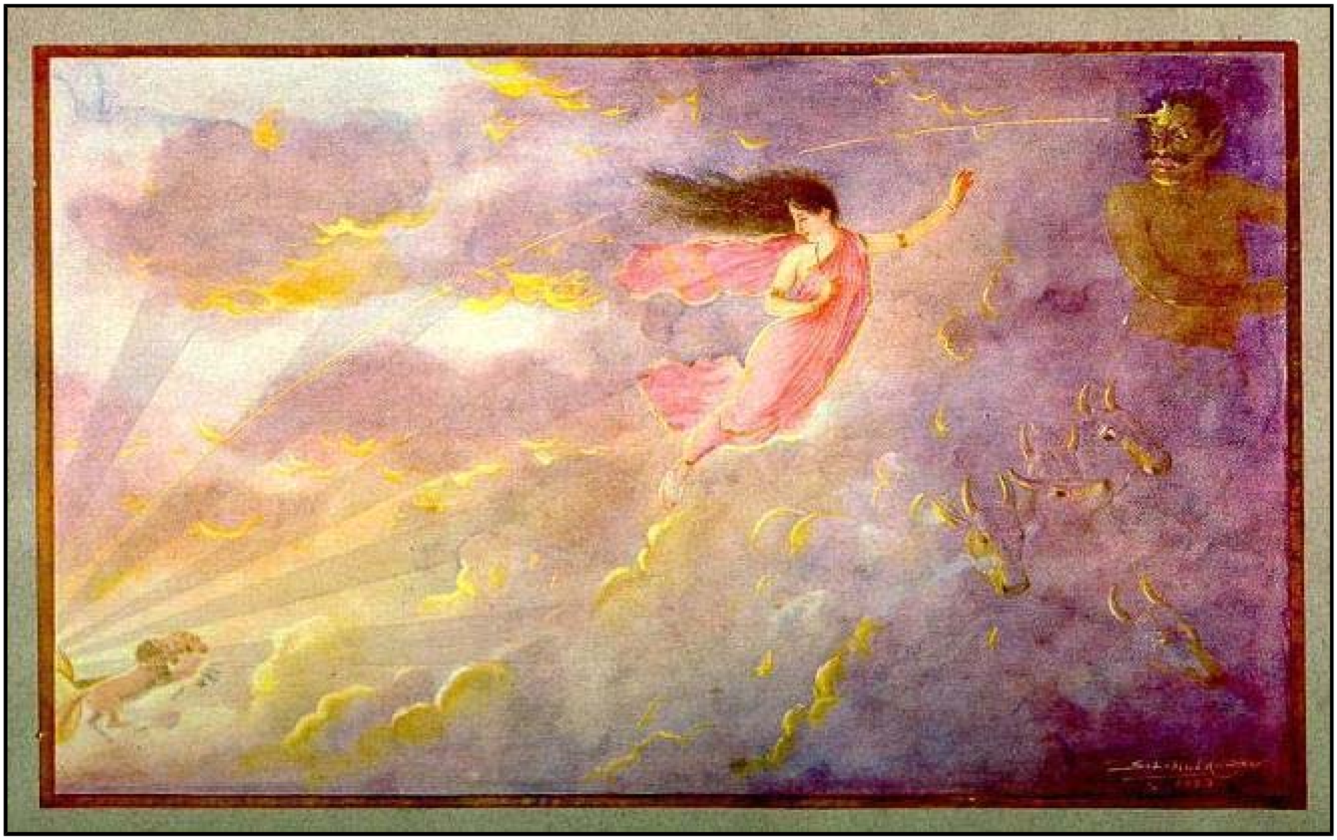
India’s attitude to nature was one of comradeship. Flowers, birds, beasts and men shared the one life, facing the same suffering and pain of the upward travail, entertained the same sentiments and affections. **The early Vedic Indians became lyrical in their adoration of nature and its manifestations**. This is a description of the Dawn in the **Rig Veda**:

Usha, the dawn, is often invoked, and is the subject of some of the most beautiful hymns that are to be found in the lyrical poetry of any ancient nation.

Beautous daughter of the sky!
Hold they ruddy light on high,
Grant us wealth and grant us day,
Bring us food and morning's ray.
White-robed goddess of the morning sky,
Bring us light, let night's deep shadows fly.

This light, most radiant of lights, has come; this gracious one who illumines all things is born. As night is removed by the rising sun, so is this the birthplace of the dawn....We behold her, daughter of the sky, youthful, robed in white, driving forth the darkness. Princess of limitless treasure, shine down upon us throughout the day." - Rig Veda I. 113.

"We gaze upon her as she comes
The shining daughter of the sky
The mighty darkness she uncovers,
And light she makes, the pleasant one that we see."



Usha! (Dawn) Hail, Beautous daughter of the sky!
*(source: **The Splendour That Was 'Ind' - By K T Shah**).*

***

Of the hymns to other deities, the hymns to those to Usha, the Dawn, are especially beautiful. Some of the loveliest nature poetry of this period is dedicated to her, depicted as a young maiden who comes to mankind in the special characteristics of the dawn. Dawn bring a feeling of hope and refreshment, of entering into the activity of the universe.

The Aryas worshipped Nature. They were fascinated by their natural surroundings. Gods representing the forces of nature are mentioned in the hymns of Rig Veda. Rta was the term used to mean the natural law of the cosmic order and morality. It was the regulator of the whole Universe. The lotus keeps its vigil during the night and opens its heart to the life-giving touch of the sun in the early morn. The bee and flower play a game of hide and seek. All nature, flowers, trees, birds and deer grieve over Shakuntala's departure from her father's hermitage and her leave-taking is one of the most touching scenes in the drama of Kalidasa. The swan paints a poetic picture of Nala on whom Damyanti had set her heart. The bird Jatayu gives a fight to Ravana to rescue Sita as she is being kidnapped to Lanka. Indian literature is suffused with a feeling of tenderness towards all sub-human manifestations of life.

(source: **India: A synthesis of cultures – by Kewal Motwani** p. 110-111 and 166-167).

Top of Page

Mountains - The Abode of the Gods

"Of the immovable things
I am the mighty Himalayas".
- **Tenth Discourse; Shloka 2.5**

In the words of the ancient Indian poet, **Kalidasa:**

"The Himalaya is a great devatatma, a great spiritual presence, stretching from the west to the eastern sea like a measuring rod to gauge the world's greatness." The creativity of this genius was that he was able to see it as a single unity this overwhelmingly powerful image of the mighty Himalayan range.

Even the mention of mountains in India brings the word **Himalaya** immediately to the mind. The Himalayan range as a whole is sacred because it is in the north, which for Hindus is the direction of wisdom and spiritual rebirth. It also includes the highest peaks in the world, which are a sight to inspire awe and wonder in people of any race or creed. Even Mount Olympus in Greek mythology would pale in front of the reverence shown to the Himalayas in the Hindu stories. Neither is Mount Fuji as significant to the Japanese as the Himalayas to Hindus. From times immemorial, the Himalayas have given out speechless invitations to sages, anchorites, *yogis*, artists, philosophers et al. The western Himalayas teems with esteemed pilgrimages so much so that the entire Kumayun range can be called **Tapobhumi** or land of spiritual practices. Where else apart from Kailash and Manas-sarovar in the Himalayas could an all-abnegating Shiva roam with his bull?

From the Himalayas has originated so many life-giving perennial rivers that have sustained such a rich civilization.



Of these the Ganges is the most respected one. **Shankaracharya** (788-820), who propounded the Mayavad doctrine, referred to the holy river as the goddess of divine essence, and established one of the four cardinal hermitages in the Garhwal Himalayas.

Scientist **J C Bose**(1858-1937), also ventured into the Himalayas, as expounded in his sagely philosophical essay **Bhagirathir Utsha Sandhane**, to explore how the Ganges flows down from the "matted locks of Shiva".

Apart from being a natural heritage, the Himalayas is a spiritual heritage for the Hindus. The most visited places of pilgrimage in India are located in the Himalayas. Prominent among them are the Nath troika of **Amarnath, Kedarnath** and **Badrinath.** There are also three seminal Sikh pilgrimage spots in the Uttarakhand Himalayas. **All sages and prophets have found the Himalayas best for spiritual pursuits.** Swami Vivekananda founded his Mayavati Ashram 50 km from Almora. The Mughul emperor Jehangir said about Kashmir, the westernmost extent of the Himalayas: "If there is a paradise on earth, it's here".

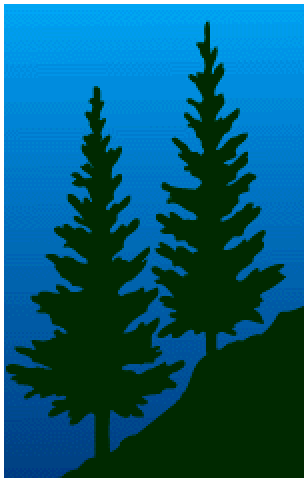
As the loftiest mountains on Earth, the Himalayas have come to embody the highest ideals and aspirations. The sight of their sublime peaks, soaring high and clean above the dusty, congested plains of India, has for centuries inspired visions of transcendent splendor and spiritual liberation.

Invoking such visions, the **Puranas**, ancient works of Hindu stories, have this to say of Himachal, or the Himalayas:

"In the space of a hundred ages of the Gods, I could not describe to you the glories of Himachal; that Himachal where Siva dwells and where the Ganges falls like the tendril of a lotus from the foot of Vishnu. There are no other mountains like Himachal, for there are found Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himachal."

The Himalayas are sacred for followers of five Asian religions--**Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and the indigenous Bon tradition of Tibet.** These religions revere the mountains as places of power where many of their most important sages and teachers have attained the heights of spiritual realization. Himalayas are often refered to as **devatma** or God-souled. **Giri-raj** or the King of Mountains, as the Himalayas is often called, is also a deity by itself in the Hindu pantheon. Hindus view the Himalayas as supremely sacred, as a corollary to seeing god in every atom of the universe. The mighty altitude of the

Himalayas is a constant remembrance to the loftiness of the human soul, its vastness. a prototype for the universality of human consciousness. Mt Everest being the highest spot on earth has been truly recognised as the crowing glory of the Himalayas. It is the mother goddess for Sherpas, who worship it as Chomolungma while the Nepalese call it Sagarmatha.



Hindus, by far the largest group in India with more than 800 million adherents, regard the entire range as the God Himalaya, father of Parvati, the wife of Siva. King of the mountains, Himalaya lives high on a peak with his queen, the Goddess Mena, in a palace ablaze with gold, attended by divine guardians, maidens, scent-eating creatures and other magical beings. His name, composed of the words hima and alaya, means in the Sanskrit language of ancient India the **"abode of snow."** As a reservoir of frozen water, the body and home of the God Himalaya is the divine source of sacred rivers, such as the Ganges and Indus, that sustain life on the hot and dusty plains of northern India.

The grandeur of Himalayas

Ernest B. Havell has observed: "The Himalayas offer equal opportunities for artistic research: they have always been the pivot of Indian religious art…The Indian order of architecture, the design of Indian temples, and the symbolism of the principal figures in Indian iconography, are all focused in the Himalayas." Take only a cursory survey of Indian literature, he further says, and you will find that all Indian poetry and mythology, point to the Himalayas as the center of the world, and as the throne of the great gods. According to the **Vishnu Purana**, Brahma has his throne in this region, shaped like the seed-vessel of a lotus. Even in the farthest corners of South India, the Hindu regards the Himalayas, not from the point of view of the mountaineering sportsman, or that of the scientific explorer, but as the Muslim thinks of Mecca and the Christian of Jerusalem."

(source: **The Himalayas in Indian Art – by E B Havell** v. 4, 6).

For centuries, the mountains, the Himalaya and the Vindhya, and the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Sindhu, Krishna, Mahanadi and Cauvery, have been the **cradles of India's civilisation. They have given it the mosaic of its diversity and provided its deep, enduring spiritual strands. Of these again, the Himalaya has, over millennia, commanded a special reverence.**

It is the abode of the gods, home to the great pilgrim centres of Amarnath, Kedar, Badrinath, Mount Kailash and Manas Sarovar. It has been a forbidding barrier deterring invaders through the ages and, in its **snow-capped heights, abiding reminders of Nature's majesty**. Ganga, Yamuna, Sindhu and that other great river of northern India, Brahmaputra, emerge from its folds. **The sensitive return from its slopes chastened and humbled, aware of the forces that-far more powerful than them-control the elements.**

(source: **Himalayas - By Hiranmay Karlekar** - dailypioneer.com - August 5 2004).

W J Grant has written eloquently about scenic India:

"India has stupendous mountains and quiet, village dotted plains. Her rivers sweep majestically on the plains and sing silver songs among the hills. The Himalayas form a great northern battlement with an average height of about 18,000 feet.

The grandeur of this region outwits description, its scale is so baffling. It is a dwelling place for gods. A throne of stupendous whiteness, mystery, power majesty. But above all, mystery – that mystery which no science can banish and no reason conquer. This is where Supernatural walks with regal feet. At Darjeeling, with the majesty of the Himalayas looking down on one's littleness. It does one no good. The air is pure and strong. The scenic vastness kills petty conceits…"

(source: **The Spirit of India - By W. J. Grant** London published by B. T. Batsford Ltd. 1933 preface and p. 11-13).

E. Kawaguchi, a Japanese Buddhist abbot, was so captivated by the grandeur of the Himalayas near Manosarovar and Mt. Kailas, that he described it as 'unique and sublime.' Mt. Kailas, he says, 'towers so majestically above the peaks around, that I fancied I saw the image of our Mighty Lord Buddha, calmly addressing his five hundred disciples: verily, verily, it was a natural Mandala!'

(source: **[Our Heritage and Its Significance](#) - By Shripad Rama Sharma** p. 15-16).

The ancient poets and sages regarded the range as more than a realm of snow; they saw it as an earthly paradise sparkling with streams and forests set beneath beautiful peaks. Above and beyond the earthly paradise of the Himalayas lie the heights of heaven.

In the Hindu imagination, Kashmir is said to be the abode of gods. **Amid these deeply forested hills, Siva is said to have narrated to his consort Parvati, the sacred Amarkatha, the secret of immortality.** In ancient times, Kashmir was known as **Sarada Peeth, the seat of the goddess of learning.**

Indian thinkers have always seen the world around as a reflection of the beauty of God. It is believed that the feeling of ecstasy upon seeing the beauty of nature or a truly fine work of art is akin to brahmananda (the final bliss of enlightenment) itself. In that moment of bliss, the faithful sense their oneness with the whole of creation and the great beauty of God that is reflected in every aspect of the world

(source: **[Philosophical and architectural marvels of Kashmir valley](#) - By Benoy K Behl**).

1. Mount Kailash: One peak in the Himalayan region stands out above all others as the ultimate sacred mountain for more than half-a-billion people in India, Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. Hidden behind the main range of the Himalayas at a high point of the Tibetan Plateau northwest of Nepal, Mount Kailas rises in isolated splendor near the sources of four major rivers of the Indian subcontinent--the Indus, Brahmaputra, Sutlej and Karnali. Hindus also regard Kailash as the place where the divine form of the Ganges, the holiest river of all, cascades from heaven to first touch the Earth and course invisibly through the locks of Siva's hair before spewing forth from a glacier 140 miles to the west.



At only 22,028 feet, Kailash is thousands of feet lower than Everest and other Himalayan peaks. Yet its extraordinary setting and appearance more than make up for its modest height. Kailash retains its grandeur when viewed from a distance. More than any other peak in the Himalayas, it opens the mind to the cosmos around it, evoking a sense of infinite space that makes one aware of a vaster universe encompassing the limited world of ordinary experience. It has served as an inspiration for numerous Hindu temples and shrines in the distant plains of India. **The sight of the peak has a powerful effect, bringing tears to the eyes of many who behold it, leaving them convinced that they have glimpsed the abode of the Gods beyond the round of life and death. Neither Hindus, Buddhists, nor any Tibetans would ever contemplate trying to climb Kailash.**

Hindus view Kailash as the divine dwelling place of God Siva and Goddess Parvati. There, as the Supreme Yogi, naked and smeared with ashes, His matted hair coiled on top of His head, He sits on a tiger skin, steeped in the indescribable bliss of meditation. From His position of aloof splendor on the summit, His third eye blazing with supernatural power and awareness, the lord of the mountain calmly surveys the joys and sorrows, the triumphs and tragedies, the entire play of illusion that make up life in the world below. The power of His meditation destroys the world of illusions that bind people to the painful cycle of death and rebirth. When He rises to dance, He takes on the functions of Brahma and Vishnu and creates and preserves the universe itself.

Sagarmatha or Mt. Everest

Why it is called Everest is given in a book "Science and the Raj: 1857-1905" by Deepak Kumar. George Everest was Surveyor General of India from 1830-43. However, in 1852 an Indian named Radhanath Sikdar was one of the first to compute that that peak XV was the highest point on Earth. When Radhanath told Colonel Waugh, the new SGI, Waugh immediately named it Everest after his predecessor and benefactor even though the peak had **local names like Sagarmatha. According to Kumar the Nepalese names were Devadungha and Gaurishankar and the Tibetan name Jamokangkar.**

The Royal Geographical Society approved of the name Everest but the Royal Asiatic Society repudiated it. Later S. G. Burrard, another SGI, admitted that **"when the Gaurishankar controversy opened, the name Everest was an interloper on the map of Asia".** Of course, the racist British, keen to play down the scientific

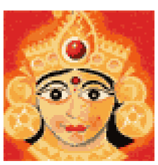
capabilities of Indians, did not mention that it was Raghanath Sikdar in Calcutta who had first realized the importance of peak XV.

2. Goddess of Bliss: Nanda Devi

In addition to the paradise She shares with Siva on Kailas, Parvati has her abode on a number of other mountains. As Nanda Devi, the **"Goddess of Bliss,"** She dwells in beauty on the lovely peak of that name in the Himalayas northeast of Delhi. The highest mountain in India outside the principality of Sikkim, Nanda Devi soars in alluring curves of rock and ice to culminate in a delicate summit, poised at 25,645 feet above a ring of snow peaks that form a sanctuary protecting the Goddess from all but Her most determined admirers. The only break in their otherwise impregnable wall of rock and snow is the terrifying gorge of the **Rishi Ganga**, one of the sources of the sacred Ganga, named after seven sages of Hindu stories, who fled the oppression of demons to seek refuge with the Goddess before departing this world to become enshrined as seven stars in the constellation of Ursa Major. Shepherds and porters from nearby villages who venture into the area believe that they can sometimes hear the sounds of these sages--drums beating, the blare of trumpets and the eerie barking of dogs. The few foreign mountaineers who manage to penetrate the gorge, inching their way along the sides of sheer cliffs that plunge thousands of feet into the river roaring below, find themselves in a paradise of gentle meadows filled with flowers at the foot of the sacred peak, which stands like a temple in the middle of the sanctuary itself.



Nanda Devi lies in Uttarakhand, the principal area of pilgrimage in the Indian Himalayas. This region ranks second only to Kailash and Manasarovar in the degree of its sanctity for Hindus. Closer to the lowlands and much more accessible, it is visited by many more pilgrims, who come by the tens of thousands to bathe at Gomukh, the glacial source of the Ganga, and to worship at Kedarnath and Badrinath, lofty temples of Siva and Vishnu sequestered in narrow valleys beneath the icy thrones of the Gods themselves. The region is also the favorite haunt of holy men and wandering yogis, who come to follow the example of Siva and meditate in the sharp clear air of the heights, within sight of the peaks that lead to heaven and the goal they seek.



As the Goddess who resides on the highest mountain in the region, Nanda Devi has many shrines and temples dedicated to Her. One of the better-known ones is in the hill station of Almora, which affords one of the best views of the peak itself and the mountains that surround it. Although primarily a benevolent deity, Nanda can take on the form of **Durga,** the wrathful Goddess. The people of the region also view Nanda Devi as a benevolent source of life and renewal. According to ancient Hindu tales, a flood once covered the entire world. A sage named Manu was warned of the impending disaster and built a boat in which he survived. Vishnu incarnated himself as a fish and towed the craft to safety on a mountain peak. As the waters receded, Manu together with his family and the remnants of all living creatures went down the slope to repopulate the Earth. The people of Uttarakhand identify the mountain of the flood as Nanda Devi, and one local group, the Rajis, still regard the peak as the abode of their ancestors. According to one legend, the seven sages accompanied Manu and remained behind to dwell in the company of the Goddess.

3. Annapurna and Machapuchare: Goddess **Parvati** dwells in yet another form on sacred Annapurna One, named like Nanda Devi for the deity said to reside on its summit. A range of peaks that includes Gangapurna, Machapuchare and Annapurnas One through Four, Annapurna rises in one long sweep above the lush green hills of central Nepal. Seen from the tropical valley of Pokhara in the twilight before dawn, the range's peaks appear to float like bluish-gray icebergs on a sea of liquid shadows. Etched with shadowed flutings, the corrugated face of Annapurna One--the highest summit at 26,545-feet--becomes a golden backdrop to the slender pointed peak of Machapuchare, the "Fish's Tail."



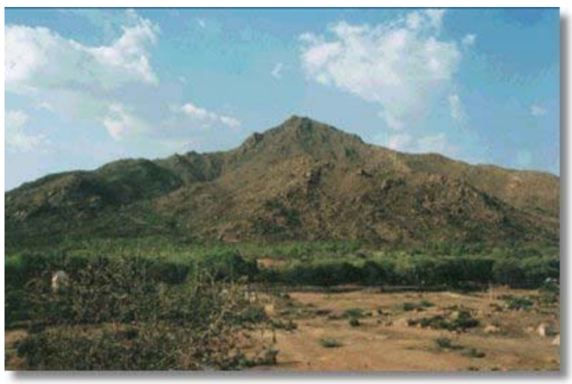
Annapurna means in **Sanskrit "She who is filled with food."** Unlike Nanda Devi, who can take on the wrathful form of Durga, Annapurna is regarded as a purely benevolent deity. A kindhearted Goddess of plenty, She is the Queen of Banaras, the holy city of the Hindus on the banks of the Ganga south of Nepal. Each year, after the autumn harvest, the people of Banaras celebrate



a festival dedicated to Her called Annakuta, the "Food Mountain," in which they fill Her temple with a mountain of food--rice, lentils, and sweets of all kinds to be distributed to those who come to receive Her blessings.

Within the heart of the range lies a hidden basin of beautiful meadows and glaciers, resembling the sanctuary surrounding Nanda Devi. A curtain of rock and ice draped between mountains soaring to over 26,000 feet completely encloses this natural amphitheater, dropping nowhere lower than 19,000 feet except at one place. There, an incredible gorge 12,000 feet deep slices through this otherwise impregnable barrier, right beneath the overhanging cliffs and glaciers of Machapuchare, one of the loveliest peaks in the Himalayas.

Arunachala of Tamil Nadu



One of the best place to see how mountains are venerated is far to the south, where Arunachala juts out of the Tamil plain, a hundred miles from Chennai. At the foot of Arunachala is the ashram of **Ramana Maharshi,** one of the greatest spiritual masters of this century. Though he died in 1950, Ramana's ashram today is one of the most potent spiritual places in India, drawing people from all over the world. The only writing Ramana ever did consisted of devotional poems to the mountain. Arunchala, he was to say later, is the physical embodiment of Shiva, of God Himself. Why go anywhere else?

According to **Shiv Purana,** Brahma and Vishnu emerged from Shiva, the Unmanifest Source of all. No sooner had they come into form than they began to argue about which of them had the superior role, as the creator, and the protector of the universe. To stop their quarrelling, Shiva manifested as a column of light so radiant that both Brahma and Vishnu were temporarily blinded, and had to stop their bickering.

Top of Page

Rivers/Oceans/Lakes

The rhythm of life is dictated by water and Hindus hold rivers in great reverence. India is a country that not only nurtures the resources nature has bestowed upon her, but also worships them for the all-round prosperity they bring in their wake. Rivers are one such gift which are considered highly sacred throughout the length and breadth of the country. This is primarily because these mighty rivers have perennially been a source of livelihood to millions of people living in areas lying along their courses. No wonder people see in them a manifestation of divine female power (shakti).

"Sindhu in might surpasses all the streams that flow.... His roar is lifted up to heaven above the earth; he puts forth endless vigour with a flash of light .... Even as cows with milk rush to their calves, so other rivers roar into the Sindhu. As a warrior- king leads other warriors, so does Sindhu lead other rivers.... Rich in good steeds is Sindhu, rich in gold, nobly fashioned, rich in ample wealth."
- **Rig Veda**

"Ambitame, naditame, devitame, Sarasvati"- "O best of mothers, O best of rivers, O best of goddesses, Sarasvati"

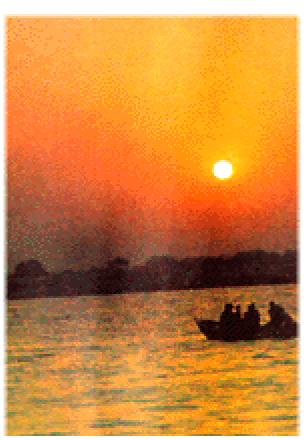
About 4,500 years ago the Sarasvati was eulogized thus in the Rig Veda.



"The Ganga is a living symbol of an ancient culture's way of life and of the sacred dimension of nature itself. The whole Hindu world still comes to her banks, to sing, to pray, to wash, to ask favors and blessings, to barter, to die."

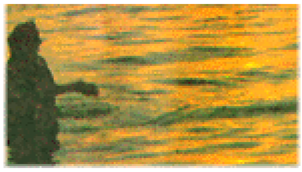
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The rivers are generally female divinities, food and life bestowing mothers. As such, they are prominent among the popular divinities represented in the works of art of the classical period. The most holy of rivers, the best known and most honored, is the Ganga or Ganges. She is personified as Goddess Ganga. The sacred river Ganga not only provides water for the land; **the water is itself the symbol of life without end.** The river rises from an ice bed, 13,800 feet above the sea level in the Garhwal Himalayas. Devotees traverse long distances to partake and procure the "Gangajal" (water of Ganga), as it is almost thought to be divine. Because the Gangajal procured from the "Har ki Pauri" in Hardwar perennially remains fresh! In mythology, Ganga is depicted as a beautiful young woman, holding a lotus in one hand, cascading down the tresses of Lord Shiva The story of Goddess Ganga is one of the most important themes in Indian mythology which has inspired the artists and sculptors. The doorway of every temple in India is guarded by an anthropomorphic representation of river Ganga.



'O Mother Ganga, may your water,
abundant blessing of this world,
treasure of Lord Shiva, playful Lord of all the earth,
essence of the scriptures and
embodied goodness of the gods,
May your water, sublime wine of immortality,
Soothe our troubled souls.'

The ancient city of Allahabad (formerly known as **Prayag**) lies at the confluence of the Ganga (Ganges) and the Yamuna, two sacred rivers that have been cradles of the Indian civilisation. The city is mentioned in the oldest Indian literature such as the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas. According to Hindu tales, Lord Brahma, the creator chose a place



where three of the holiest rivers on earth could meet in harmony. The city is also referred to as `Tirth Raj' or the `king of pilgrimage centers'.

"The Ganga is a living presence, a protector, a healer of ills. The Ganga is as alive as it ever was with the hopes and dreams of an entire culture.

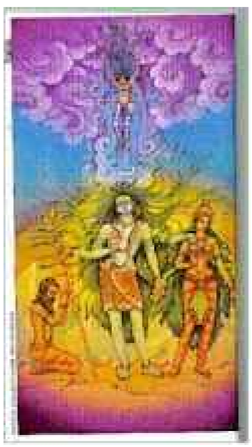
Even Jawaharlal Nehru, that arch-modernists, asked that his ashes be cast into the Ganga at Prayag.

" I am proud of this noble heritage which was and still is ours, and I am aware that I too, like all of us, am a link in that uninterrupted chain which finds its origin in the dawn of history, in India's immemorial past. It is in testimony of this and as a last homage to the cultural heritage of India that I request that a handful of my ashes be thrown in the Ganges at Allahabad, so that they may be borne to the vast ocean that bears on the shores of India."

(source: **The India I Love - By Marie-Simone Renou** p.128).

Kashi is the holiest place for Hindus. It is considered holier than the sky.

It is at Kashi that **Count Keyserling** describes the ecstasy that Hindu devotion means.



*"*The whole Hindu world still comes to her banks, to sing, to pray, to wash, to ask favors and blessings, to barter, to die. The Ganga is a living symbol of an ancient culture's way of life and of the sacred dimension of nature itself. Of all the goddesses, Ma Ganga, is the only one without a shadow. She is the unequivocal fountain of mercy and compassion, here in this world only to comfort her children. Her waters are the milk, the nectar of immortality, source of all life, and abundance. Countless flowers are strewn across her body daily; millions of lights set sail every evening upon her waters. While stories of gods and goddesses come and go with the ages, while stories replaces or rivals another, the organic presence of Ganga continues as ever, absorbing her devotees' offerings and ashes in the same way she has done since time immemorial."

(source: **Travel Through Sacred India - By Roger Housden** p. 22-23).

Of particular sanctity in India are the perennial rivers, among which the Ganga stands first. This river, personified as a goddess, originally flowed only in heaven until she was brought down by **Bhagiratha** to purify the ashes of his ancestors. She came down reluctantly, cascading first on the head of Siva, in order to break her fall, which would have shattered the Earth. Confluences are particularly holy, and the Gangas' confluence with the Yamuna at Allahabad is the most sacred spot in India. Another river of importance is the Saraswati, which loses itself in desert; it was personified as a goddess of eloquence and learning.

Kumbh Mela: The magic of the mystical Ganga. According to devotees, those who come to the river with a prayer, never leave back unsatisfied. *Faith in the power of the river, to heal, to resurrect the dead from the grave.* The recent **Mahakumbh** at Tirthanagari Prayag, has witnessed a mindboggling rush among people, both Indian and foreign, to take a dip in the water of the river, whose origin is as deep as the Himalayas themselves. *"Ganga Maiyya (Mother Ganga)* will take care of us," The belief among the devotees, startles many first timers to this mela. The sheer scale of the Kumbh mela is so mind-boggling.



The Kumbh Mela - The Biggest Spiritual event in the Globe: It's extraordinary to witness this sort of mass spiritual communion between so many people and the river. The varied images from Kumbh Mela attracts everyone from Boston to Benaras."

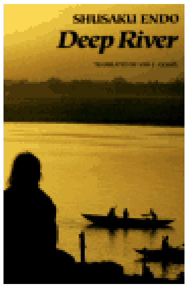
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Collected on January 23, 2001, this one-meter resolution satellite image shows the start of the Maha Kumbh Mela's busiest bathing day. Masses of people are visible bathing in the river, and the shape of the river bank has changed.
(source: http://www.spaceimaging.com/).

It's extraordinary to witness this sort of mass spiritual communion between so many people and the river. The varied images from Kumbh attracts everyone from Boston to Benaras." -- the biggest spiritual event in the globe. **Bishambhar Bhushan,** poor and blind, traveled two days in a cramped train from his village of Dhanvani in central Madhya Pradesh state. Bhushan, 80, scooped up the cold river with his hands, and offered it to the heavens in a centuries-old gesture. "I told Mother Ganga, take me across life, mother," he said, his eyelids twitching with excitement. "My life's ambition is fulfilled."

Together, the Kalpavasis and the Sanyasis, provide a glimpse into the spiritual mindset of the people of India set in their pursuit of salvation. Kalpavasis, are people who survive on minimal food and clothing, and whose number runs into tens of thousands. They sleep in the open during the freezing winter nights on the river banks, revealing the spirit of the Kumbh as much as the sadhus who come in hoards with their respective flag-bearers. In perhaps one of the largest gatherings ever, millions of pilgrims took a dip at the

seven ghats at Sangam - the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna - on Wednesday, stretching the administration and the police to their limits, but reinforcing the fact the Indian milieu had not lost touch with the divine.



In his moving novel, **Deep River**, **Shusaku Endo** (1923-1996) a major Japanese author writes about a group of Japanese tourists, each of whom is wrestling with his or her own demons, travels to the **River Ganga** on a pilgrimage of grace. Each has come to India and the holy river Ganga on a spiritual quest, and each discovers that God has "many faces."

(For more on Kumbh mela please refer to the **Glimpses** chapter).

"Like a moonless night, like flowerless trees,
such are the countries and regions deprived of the Beneficial virtues of the Ganges.
Like a sunless sky, an earth without mountains, an atmosphere without wind -
thus undoubtedly are the countries and regions that the Ganges does not bathe.
If the wind which has caressed the waves of the Ganges touches a man's skin,
it immediately carries off all the sin he has committed. As small children tormented by hunger crowd around their mother begging, so men here below, desirous of attaining their salvation, hurry imploringly to the Ganges!"

- such are the virtues of the Ganga celebrated in the **Mahabharata**.

Reverence for Water

Waters contain
All disease-dispelling medicaments,
Useful for the upkeep of our body,
So that we may live long
To enjoy the bright sun.
That there is ambrosia in waters,
There is healing balm in them,
And there are medicinal herbs,
Know this all,
And by their proper use become wiser.

- Rig Veda 1.23

I seek the Lord of the Waters of golden appearance.
May he hear our entreaty and grant us a place of ablution.
Whatever food I have taken in the house of the wicked, whatever gift I have received at the hands of the crafty, whatever sin of thought or word or deed I have committed, from this may Indira, Varuna, Brhaspati and Surya cleanse me again and again.
I have eaten or drunk to excess, or consorted with people of violent ways, may king Varuna wipe it all away.
Thus, rid of impurity and evil and free from my sin, may I find liberation and pass to the world of the Lord of creation.

- **Taittiriya Aranyaka 1.12-13**

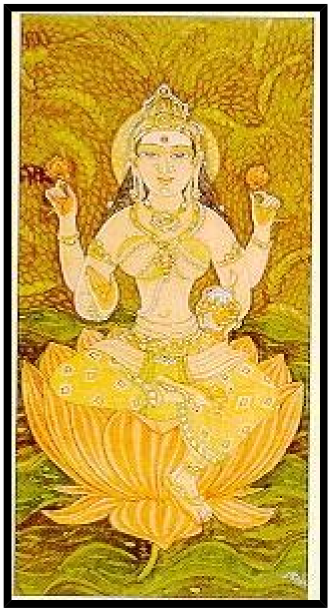
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River Ganga, as it is known to most Indians, is a living icon of the Hindu religion. The Hindu scriptures say **King Bhagirathi** prayed to the god Shiva in penance at Gangotri and was rewarded with the goddess Ganga, delivered in the form of a river. Because the river would have devastated the area if it had fallen freely to earth, Shiva caught it in the locks of his matted hair, permitting a gentle descent. King Bhagirathi's prayer rock is preserved in a small temple alongside the river. The main temple, built in the 1700s, lies a few hundred yards away. Gangotri is an important pilgrimage for Hindus, and thousands come here every year. In April Gangotri is the site for a major celebration of Ganga. That celebration focuses on the return to the Gangotri temple of the small figurine that represents the goddess Ganga. Since snow makes Gangotri inaccessible for nearly six months each year, the "deity" is kept in winter in a similar temple in Mukhuwa, a village in the valley below Gangotri. The deity is brought up the mountain each spring in a colorful procession led by the blowing of horns.

(source: **Journeying to the Source of Ganga - By Neal Jackson** - **npr.org**).

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Not far from the foot of the peak itself, at nearly 15,000 feet above sea level, reflecting the light of its snows, repose the calm blue waters of the most sacred lake of Hindu religion and stories -holy **Lake Manasarovar, "Lake of the Mind."** The hardiest of Hindu pilgrims aspire to take the long and dangerous journey over high passes to bathe in Manasarovar's icy waters and cleanse their minds of the sins that threaten to condemn them to the suffering of rebirth.



Goddess Saraswati is the embodiment of the mighty **Saraswati River of the Vedas**. Saraswati means "the essence of one's own self." The Sanskrit word '*sara*' means essence and '*swa'* means 'self'. **She is the earliest goddess who is associated with a river in the Indian tradition.** She is the divine spouse of Lord Brahma, the creator. Since knowledge is necessary for creation, Saraswati symbolizes the creative power of Lord Brahma. She is also praised for her ability both to cleanse and fertilize the earth, and has been equated with the goddess of learning, poetry, music, and culture. She is associated with speech- Vac: the goddess of riverlike, streaming speech.

Saraswati is typically shown seated on a lotus. Like the swan, the lotus seat of the goddess suggests her transcendence of the physical world. She floats above the muddy imperfections of the physical world, unsullied, pure, beautiful. Although rooted in the mud (like man rooted in the physical world), the lotus perfects itself in a blossom that has transcended the mud. She inspires people to live in such a way that they may transcend their physical limitations through the ongoing creation of culture. Goddess Saraswati is worshiped throughout India and on her special day in spring, Vasant Panchmi, she is worshipped by school children as the patron goddess of learning. The **Benaras Hindu University** was also founded on this day.

Brahmputra is the mighty river that dominates the landscape of north-east India. Emanating from the Mansarovar region in the Himalayas, it incessantly gushes down with a massive force through the dense forests of north-eastern states of India, particularly Assam. Brahmputra may not be revered as much as the Ganga is, but she is considered to be more beautiful. Despite its masculine-sounding name, Brahmputra is essentially feminine and exceeds Ganga by a good 450 kilometers in length. The most unique feature of this great river is its navigability at an astounding altitude of ten thousand feet! Like the Ganga, its waters too are snow-fed and are generously rainfed, thus making it flow throughout the year.

The Saraswati, Ganga, Yamuna, Brahmaputra, Krishna, Kaveri, and other rivers represent an ever-flowing stream of celestial grace which purifies and fertilizes the earth.

Top of Page

Mother Earth/Sun & Planet



"O Goddess Earth, the consort of Visnu,
you whose garments are the oceans and
whose ornaments are the hills and mountain ranges;
please forgive me as I walk on you this day."

In the **Artha-Veda,** composed five-thousand years ago by the Rshis, a hymn to the Earth.

May She, Queen of what has been and will be,
make a wide world for us.



Earth that bears plants of various healing powers,
may she spread wide for us and thrive.

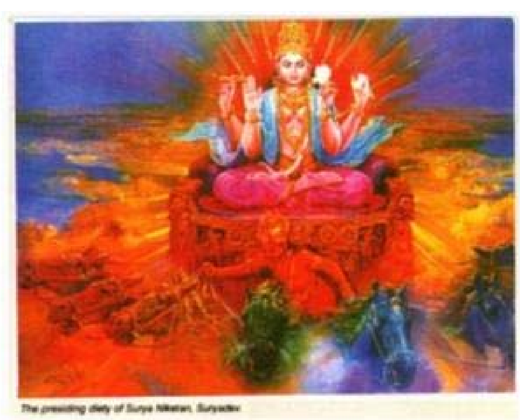
O Earth - brown, black, red and multi-colored
the firm Earth protected by Indra,
on this Earth may I stand -
unvanquished, unhurt, unslain.

This earth, our mother, has nurtured consciousness from the slime of the primeval ocean billions of years ago and has sustained the human race for countless centuries. Will we repay our debts to our mother by converting her into a burnt out cinder circling the sun into eternity?

Rock, soil, stone and dust with these
Earth is held together and bound firm.
My obeisance to gold-breasted Earth...
Rising or sitting, standing or walking,
May we, either with our right foot or our left,
Never totter o the earth. - **Atharva Veda** 12.1.26, 28

Sun/Dawn/Fire/ Worship

"We meditate upon the supreme effulgence of the Divine creative Sun, that he may give impulse to our intelligence." **Rig Veda** III 62.10



The Sun (Surya) is the visible presence, the vision of the Divine, the cosmic symbol for the Supreme. He is the Divine light and presence that fills all the worlds. The Sun of illumination follows in love affair the Dawn (**Usha**) of awakening. Usha or dawn represents Human aspiration as the Spiritual dawn.

Surya is possibly the most Vedic God. In the RgVeda, he is worshipped as Savitr. As the source of life, light and warmth. He is also the source of inner enlightenment as the famous Gayatri mantra suggests. At dawn, the householder and his wife rise, purify themselves with a bath--usually in a temple pool or a river if one is available--and then make an offering to the fire-god **Agni** in their household fire. Agni represents the consciousness force, the Sacred Fire. The man will then turn towards the rising sun and ask for blessing and understanding.

The **Gayatri mantra** (chant), which forms the core of the Hindu faith, is actually addressed to Surya:



"O splendid and playful sun,
we offer this prayer to thee.
Enlighten this craving mind.
Be our protector.
May the radiance of the divine ruler guide our destiny.
Wise men salute your magnificence with oblations and words of praise."

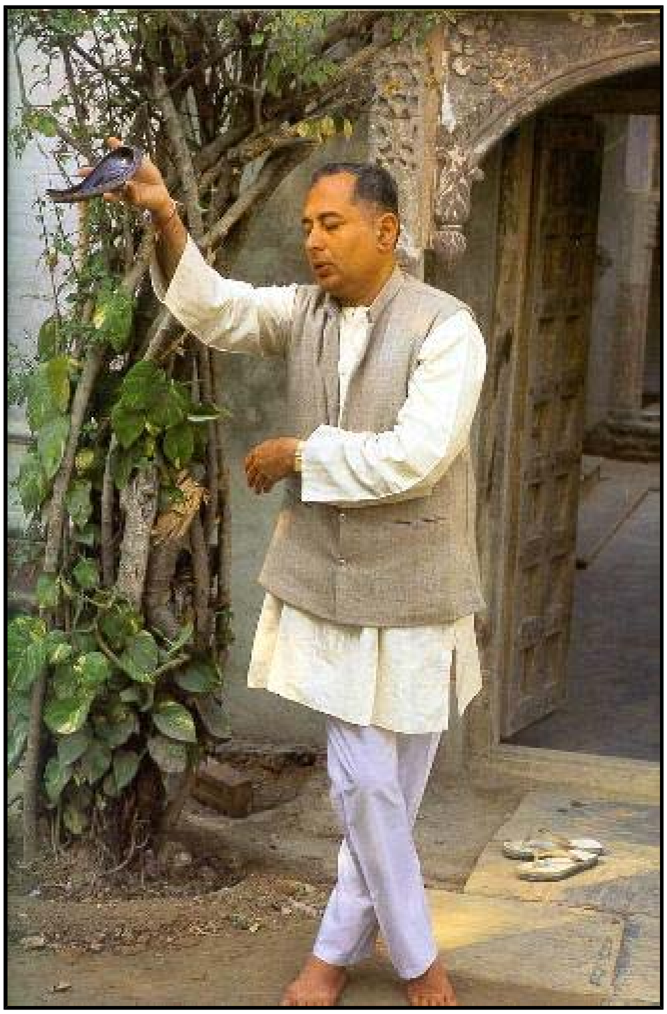
Lord Rama was also taught, by sage Agastaya, the *Adityahridayam*, a prayer addressed to the sun god.

" The Sun is the foremost physical manifestation of divine creative power. In the glorious morning the faithful bend towards the giver of life in one single gesture of adoration. "

In **Surya Sahastranam** several syno-nyms of the Sun are actually Vishnu's

names and at one place He is also called Jyotirlinga, representing Shiva. Mahakal is both the name of Shiva and the Sun. Ganesha, the son of Shiva, is also represented in the Sun. Image of the rising Sun in a water reservoir or pond appears like an elephant's trunk due to the ripples, resembling Ganesha. Gayatri and Savitri are forms of the Sun. Aditya is derived from Aditi, which is the name of Durga. The worship of the Sun God means the worship of all the five Puranic gods and goddess. Hymns of the Rig Veda confirm that the Sun is the manifestation of the whole universe.. In the Chhandogya Upanishad the Sun has been called Omkar and Udgeet. The Rig Veda says the Sun is the soul of the universe and it controls the animate as well as the inanimate. The Sun's rays have the amazing power to heal. Sun worship helped Sambha, Krishna 's grandson, get cured of leprosy. Solar treatment was a well-developed science in ancient times. Its exponents could revive dead persons by concentrating the Sun's rays on the dead body. Till recently, Swami Viryananda, Swami Dayananda's preceptor, and Swami Vishuddhananda were experts of this science and reportedly, could perform such miracles. Gopinath Kaviraj has recorded that he himself saw Vishuddhananda reviving a dead bird thus. When Alan Leo, the renowned astrologer, visited India, he was astounded to see the longevity of rural women who ate very little nutritious food. Then he noticed that they wore heavy silver ornaments and concluded that they got solar energy through the silver which probably prolonged their lives.

(source: **Surya the Sun God, Eternal Healer** - timesofindia.com).



A college professor of engineering studies in north India strikes a dancer's pose each morning when he prays to the rising sun. With his right hand he pours water from a vessel to honor the River Goddess.

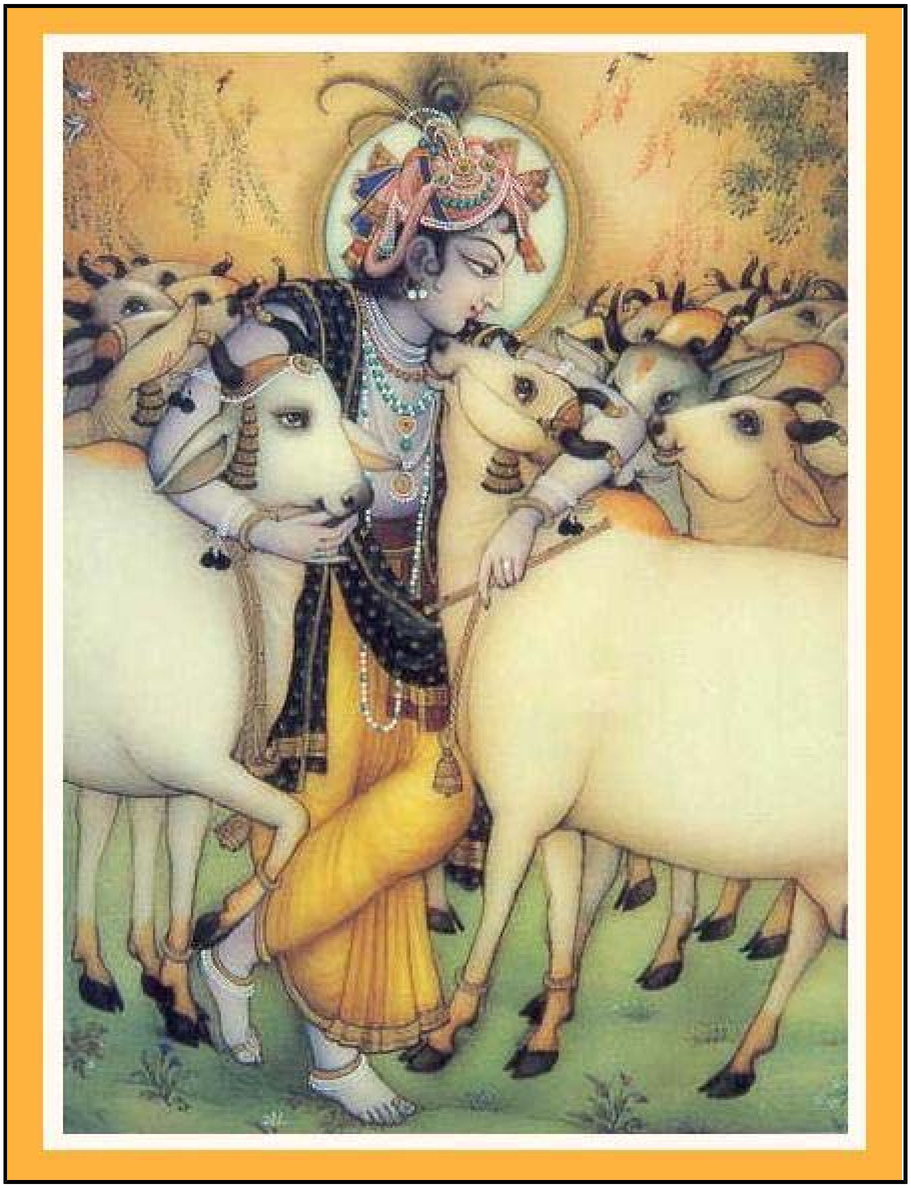
(source: **Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion - By Stephen P Huyler** *- By p 29).*

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Top of Page

Plants/Animals

The Hindu idea is that this whole world is a forest. To keep this world as it is we have to keep the world-forest intact. Hinduism describes everything in terms of divinity and in relation to the Ultimate Reality. The different aspects of this Ultimate Reality are all to be found in the various forms of the physical world.



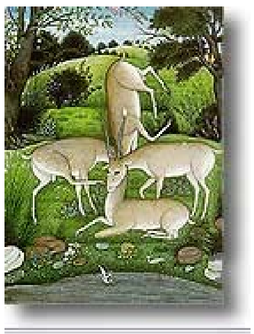
Lord Krishna brought forward the cows and played on His flute through the forest of Vrindavan, which was full of flowers, vegetables, and pasturing grass. The Vrindavan forest was as sanctified as the clear mind of a devotee.

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In the **Bhagavad Gita**, Krishna compares the world to a single banyan tree with unlimited branches in which all the species of animals, humans and demigods wander. Indian consciousness is full of trees and forests. If you look, for example, in Greek literature, you will find only a few descriptions of trees and forests, whereas Indian literature such as Ramayana and Mahabharata is full of such descriptions, as if the people were always under a tree. The bond between Indian people and trees is very strong.

Hindu tradition describes three basic categories of forest. One is shrivan, the forest which provides you prosperity. Then there is tapovan, where you can contemplate as the sages did and seek after truth. The third is mahavana – the great natural forest where all species of life find shelter. Each of these categories must be preserved.

(source: **Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth - By Ranchor Prime** p. 10).



Forests and groves were considered sacred, and flowering trees received special reverence. Just as various animals were associated with gods and goddesses, different trees and plants were also associated in the Hindu pantheon. The **Mahabharata** says that 'even if there is only one tree full of flowers and fruits in the village, that place becomes worthy of worship and respect.'

Hindus see divinity in all living creatures. Animal deities therefore, occupy an important place in Hindu dharma. Animals, for example, are very common as form of transport for various Gods and Goddesses. The entire clan of Shiva is replete with ecological symbolism. Shiva's consort Parvati is considered the daughter of the mountain. She is the personification of Mother Earth. In Hindu stories and iconography, there is a close relationship between the various deities, and their animal or bird mounts. Each divinity is associated with a particular animal or bird, and this lends a special dimension to the animal kingdom.

As the sheep is to Christianity, the cow is to Hinduism. Lord Krishna was a cowherd, and the bull is depicted as the vehicle of Lord Shiva. Today the cow has almost become a symbol of Hinduism. As opposed to the West, where the cow is widely considered as nothing better than walking hamburgers, in India, the cow is believed to be a symbol of the earth - because it gives so much yet asks nothing in return. Because of its great economic importance, it makes good sense to protect the cow.



It is said Mahatma Gandhi became a vegetarian because he felt cows were ill-treated. Such is the respect for the cow, notes scholar Jeaneane Fowler, that Indians had offered to take in millions of cows waiting for slaughter in Britain as a result of the crisis in beef production in 1996.

Snakes are a symbol of healing and primal energy. In art, the Naginis are figures of beauty.Vishnu reclines on the serpent **Ananta** eternally. In Kerala, snakes are worshipped as guardians of the home; and it is said that when a snake enters your life, there will be a new birth of creativity and wisdom. In Bengal, the goddess Manasa, a divine nagini, is worshipped for her powers to vanquish illness. Dogs have always been man's faithful friends, loyal and loving. Yudhishthira refused to enter heaven without his dog. After the Pandavas crossed over to the celestial zones, Yudhishthira's dog became dharma personified. He told Indra, ``This dog, O Lord, is highly devoted to me. He should go with me. My heart is full of compassion for him''.

Nag Panchami is observed on the 5th day of the bright half of Shravan (July-August). On this day nag, cobras and snakes are worshipped with milk, sweets, flowers, lamps and even sacrifice. The image of Nag deities made of silver; stone, wood are first bathed with water and milk, and then worshipped with the reciting of the following mantras:

> Nagah preeta bhavantih shantimapnoti vai vibhoh,
> Sashanti lok ma sadhya modate shashttih samah.



Nagaraja. 13th century. granite. Madras. Thanjavur district.

Snakes and cobras are held in awe and reverence in India. They are worshipped and offered prayers on the Nag Panchami day

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Snakes and cobras are held in awe and reverence in India. They are worshipped and offered prayers on the Nag Panchami day. Fast is observed and Brahmins are fed on this day. The piety observed on this day is considered a sure protection against the fear of snake-bite. At many places real cobras and snakes worshipped and fairs held. On this day digging the earth is prohibited, because the serpents live under the earth or in nether world and digging may hurt or annoy them. The various purans like Agni Puran, Skanda Puran, Narad Puran, etc. They roam about the land wearing lustrous jewels and ornaments. The thousand-hooded Shesh Nag or Anant is the most earth like a chaplet on his crown. When he nods or yawns, the earth with its oceans and mountains, begin to tremble. A small village near Sangli, **Battis Shirale**, is famous for its snake catchers, and people throng the streets to watch the thrilling performances of expert snake charmers.

Pola Festival - Expressing Gratitude for animals



Cattle are bathed, colorfully decorated and taken out in processions across the village, accompanied by the music of drumbeats in Central India.

Pola brings out an important facet of Hindu culture, which does not look upon cattle as mere beasts of burden, but treats them with dignity and gratitude.

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The harvest festival is celebrated by farmers all over Maharashtra. On this day bullocks, which are an integral part of the agricultural chores and consequently the village economy, are honored. **They are bathed, colorfully decorated and taken out in processions across the village, accompanied by the music of drumbeats and lezhim** (a musical instrument made of a wooden rod and an iron chain full of metallic pieces). **Pola brings out an important facet of Hindu culture, which does not look upon cattle as mere beasts of burden, but treats them with dignity and gratitude.**

On the new moon day of Shravan, farmers celebrate the feast of the bull. Man is part of nature. There is a strong bond between man and everything round him. The bull is a farmer's inseparable partner. The whole year round the bull renders him invaluable service. On Pola's Day the farmer wants to show his appreciation to the bull. **On this day the bulls are washed and decorated.** Their horns are colourfully painted. They are not given any work. They are given special food, taken in procession and worshipped. In some places the camel is considered more important than the bull. For some people the horse, or the donkey, or sheep are more important. The importance of an animal is related to its utility to man.

(source: **travelmasti.com** and **aryabhatt.com**).

Vegetarianism in Hinduism

There is evidence of vegetarianism in the **Vedas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Yoga Sutras** and most sacred texts of Hindus. These scriptures unambiguously support the meatless diet. This was observed by the ancient travelers like Megasthenes and Fa-Hsien, a Chinese Buddhist monk who, in the fifth century, traveled to India in order to obtain authentic copies of the scriptures.

*"*The purchaser of flesh performs himsa (violence) by his wealth; he who eats flesh does so by enjoying its taste; the killer does himsa by actually tying and killing the animal. Thus, there are three forms of killing: he who brings flesh or sends for it, he who cuts off the limbs of an animal, and he who purchases, sells or cooks flesh and eats it - all of these are to be considered meat-eaters."

\- **Mahabharata**

In the **Tirukural**, a Tamil scripture written over 2,000 years ago, abstaining from a diet consisting of flesh is clearly stated as a virtue.

"Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is to not sacrifice and consume any living creature..." - **Tirukural**

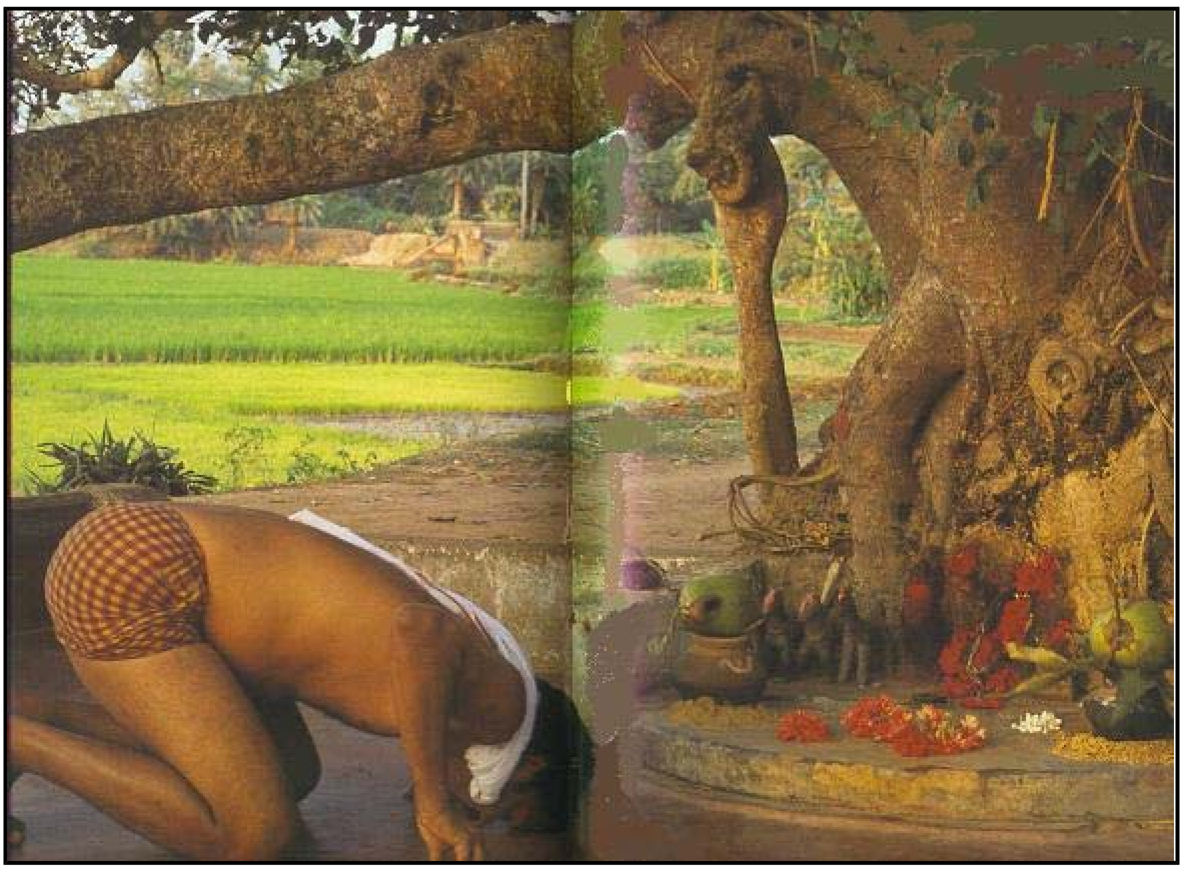
Today India has the highest population of vegetarians in the world. According to reports 20% of India's population is vegetarian.

Indians have been behind some of the greatest discoveries and ideas in the world. From mathematics, to astronomy to literature, the Indian mind has always been able to give form to abstract ideas and concepts. Vegetarianism is just one more thing that we should thank India for fostering.

(source: **Survey of Vegetarianism: The Journey of an Idea - By Leah Renault - swaveda.com**).

Vat Savitiri - The Worship Of A Sacred Tree

The Savitri festival falls on the full moon day of the month of Jyeshtha, around June. On this day, women fast and worship the Vat tree to pray for the growth and strength of their families, like the sprawling tree which lives for centuries. Newly married women visit a nearby Vat tree and worship it by tying red threads of love around it. They offer flowers and sweets to the tree. When the moon rises full and resplendent on the horizon, special feasts are shared by families.



A farmer prostrates himself in prayer beneath a sacred peepul tree his village worships as the Goddess-Spirit of their community in South India.
(source: **Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion - By Stephen P Huyler** *- By p 91).*

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Almost every woman in India knows the Puranic legend of Savitri, one of the most venerated women of Indian

mythology. Savitri was a princess, born by the blessing of the sun god to King Ashwapati. A lustrous woman of great beauty, she was sent to the forest ashrams of sages to look for a suitable bridegroom for herself. Eventually, she met Satyawan, a prince living in the forest because his blind father had been banished from his empire. When Savitri revealed to her parents her determination to marry Satyawan, the court astrologers tried to stop her. They said that the prince's lifeline clearly showed that he would die within a year. Savitri had however, accepted him as her husband and would not be deterred from her resolve. She married him and went to the forest ashram to live with him and his parents.

On the full moon night of jyeshtha, the couple went into the jungle to collect firewood. As Satyawan rested under a Vat tree, Yama, the god of death came to snatch away his life. Savitri, seeing Yama take away her husband's breath, followed, pleading with him to return her husband's life. At each milestone, going from earth to heaven, Yama tried to persuade the determined princess to return home and accept the destiny of her husband as unchangeable. In the face of her resolve to conquer what appeared to be insurmountable obstacles, all his efforts were in vain. Then, to persuade her more effectively, he offered her three boons, excluding the life of her dead husband.

Savitri, a woman of great intelligence, couched her requests in such a manner that she got back everything that her family had lost. First, she asked for the lost sight of her blind father-in-law. Next, she asked for their lost empire and prosperity. And finally she asked for worthy progeny. When Yama had granted her the boon of progeny, she reminded him that his boon could not be fulfilled without Satyawan. Yama, defeated by her strength and faith, had to surrender the life force of Satyawan to her, and bless her with an immortal place in the hearts of her people.

Today, Savitri's power and her tenacity to overcome insurmountable problems remains an inspiration for every woman. She is venerated on the jyeshtha full moon day which is named after her and the tree under which this legend unfolded.Nag Panchami

(source: **Nag Panchami** and **Vat Savitri - The Worship of Sacred Trees**).

Even e Lord Krishna always wore a peacock feather in his crown.

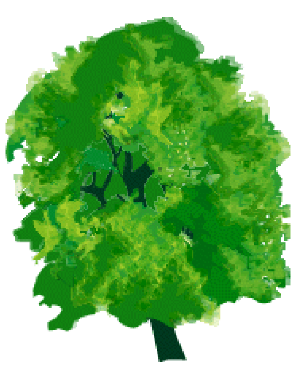


Ganesha, the son of Shiva, is a combination of elephant and man. The elephant is worshipped in this country and even today forms an integral part of many temples and festivals. **Muruka or Subramanyan**, another son of Shiva, also with the trident as his favorite weapon, and the peacock as his vehicle, is a deity of woods and mountains in South India. Animals also appear as independent divine creatures.

Sacred Groves and Trees

The *pipal* tree or *asvatta* (*Ficus religiosa*) has had a conspicuous position in the cultural landscape of north India and human collective memory for more than 5,000 years. It was depicted even on Mohenjo Daro seals. Buddha himself found enlightenment under a *pipal* tree (Mansberger, 1988). Buddha is reported to have been born in a sacred grove, Lumbinivana, full of *sal* trees (Gadgil, 1985).

For Hindus the *bel* tree, *Aegle marmelos,* is associated with Shiva, *tulasi* with Vishnu, and fig (*Ficus glomerata*) with Dattatreya, the son of Trimurty.

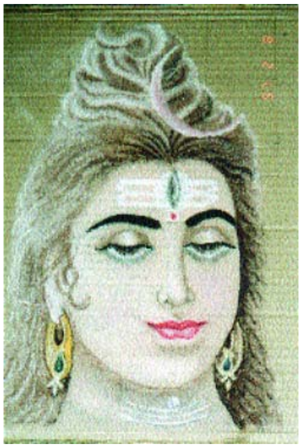


Nakeera, the Tamil poet of the Sangam period, states that Lord Muruka could be found in the forest, in a place surrounded by water, rivers, tanks, meeting places under trees, new-grown groves, etc. The *kadampa* tree is likened to Lord Muruka himself. Sangam tradition holds that he is the owner of all the hilly tracts with rich groves (Ramachandran, 1990). Ayyappa, Aiyanar and Sasta (all considered to be the same) of south India is essentially a deity of the woods, whose province is to guard the fields, crops and herds of the peasantry and to drive away their enemies.

No temples existed in India during the Vedic period. They were not to be found in the pre-Buddhist period except for wooden ones. The ancient Buddhist sacred place was the *stupa* (Hastings, ed., 1934). The various gods and

goddesses whom the indigenous population of peninsular India worshipped were not accustomed to dwell in the secluded atmosphere of temples; they loved the open air. **Even today, for the gramadevata (village goddess) of south India there are no temples in many villages.** The deity may be in the shadow of a big tree. Generally they are lodged in small shrines. In a good number of villages no object is placed to represent the deity and the tree itself is regarded as the embodiment of the deity.

An interesting stage in the transformation of the sacred tree into the anthropomorphic form was observed by the Italian traveller Della Valle, who visited India in 1623–25. He found in Surat the worship of Parvati in the form of a tree. Her face was painted on the tree and offerings were of vegetable origin (Wheller and Macmillan, 1956).



In the personification of Lord Shiva, for instance, we may observe the evolution of Indian traditional thought of living in partnership with nature. He is as old as Indian thought and his origin probably merges with oblivion in the Indus Valley culture. He has mountains and wild places as his abode. His entangled hair symbolizes the primeval untamed forest. The **Ganga** originating from his tress depicts the watershed function of sacred groves. Serpents coiled around his neck symbolize coexistence with the denizens of the ecosystem. By his trident and leopard skin attire he brings to our mind the picture of the hunter-gatherer. This destruction is followed by creation; incorporating the elements (*bhuta*s) from Mother Earth sprouts crops and grasses and once again forests. The sacred grove, on the other hand, was aboriginal forest which enhanced overall landscape heterogeneity and thereby greater plant and animal diversity. The necklace of *rudraksha* (*Elaeocarpus* spp.) adorning Shiva's neck also highlights his links with the forest.

Various trees, fruits and plants have special significance in Hindu ritual. Hindu religious scripts, stories, and rituals have attempted to drive home the importance of preserving nature by deifying it through the centuries. **Lord Krishna** says in the **Bhagavad Gita** (9.26):

> **Patram Pushpam phalam toyam, yo mey bhaktya prayachchati**
> **Tadaham bhakt yupahrutam asnaami prayataatmanaha**

I accept a leaf, flower, fruit or water Or whatever is offered with devotion.

The **neem** tree is sacred and its flower is offered to God and eaten on New Years day although it is sour. The **bilva** tree, its flowers and fruits are very sacred for Shiva worship. The **tulsi (sage)** plant is regarded as the abode of Krishna and is important in all pujas. **Sandal wood**, its paste and oil are important in worship of gods.

All plants and flowers have medicinal value in the Hindu system of medicine (ayurveda) brought by the divine medicine man **Dhanvantari** during **Samudra mathana (churning of oceans).**



The **coconut** tree and the coconut are sacred and are offered to God during worship. **Mango** leaves are used as festoons during pujas and auspicious events. All flowers and leaves of plants are used during worship for pushpa puja and patra puja. The **lotus** is a sacred flower and plant for Hindus. The **banana** plant and leaves are used for ornamentation and worship.

The 'tulsi' plant or Indian basil is an important symbol in the Hindu religious tradition. The name 'tulsi' connotes "the incomparable one". Tulsi is a venerated plant and Hindus worship it in the morning and evening. Tulsi grows wild in the tropics and warm regions. Dark or *Shyama* tulsi and light or *Rama* tulsi are the two main varieties of basil, the former possessing greater medicinal value. Of the many varieties, the *Krishna* or *Shyama* tulsi is commonly used for worship.

Tulsi As A Deity

The presence of tulsi plant symbolizes the religious bent of a Hindu family. A



Hindu household is considered incomplete if it doesn't have a tulsi plant in the courtyard. Many families have the tulsi planted in a specially built structure, which has images of deities installed on all four sides, and an alcove for a small earthen oil lamp. Some households can even have up to a dozen tulsi plants on the verandah or in the garden forming a "tulsi-van" or "tulsivrindavan" - a miniature basil forest.

Vaishavites or believers of **Lord Vishnu** worship the tulsi leaf because it's the one that pleases Lord Vishnu the most. They also wear beaded necklaces made of tulsi stems. The manufacture of these tulsi necklaces is a cottage industry in pilgrimages and temple towns.

Tulsi As An Elixir: Apart from its religious significance it is of great medicinal significance, and is a prime herb in Ayurvedic treatment. Marked by its strong aroma and a stringent taste, tusli is a kind of "the elixir of life" as it promotes longevity. The plant's extracts can be used to prevent and cure many illnesses and common ailments like common cold, headaches, stomach disorders, inflammation, heart disease, various forms of poisoning and malaria. Essential oil extracted from *karpoora* tulsi is mostly used for medicinal purposes though of late it is used in the manufacture of herbal toiletry.



According to Jeevan Kulkarni, author of **Historical Truths & Untruths Exposed,** when Hindu women worship tulsi, they in effect pray for "less and less carbonic acid and more and more oxygen - a perfect object lesson in sanitation, art and religion". The tulsi plant is even known to purify or de-pollute the atmosphere and also works as a repellent to mosquitoes, flies and other harmful insects. Tulsi used to be a universal remedy in cases of malarial fever. Prof Shrinivas Tilak, who teaches Religion at Concordia University, Montreal has made this historical citation: In a letter written to *The Times*, London, dated May 2, 1903 Dr George Birdwood, Professor of Anatomy, Grant Medical College, Bombay said, "When the Victoria Gardens were established in Bombay, the men employed on those works were pestered by mosquitoes. At the recommendation of the Hindu managers, the whole boundary of the gardens was planted with holy basil, on which the plague of mosquitos was at once abated, and fever altogether disappeared from among the resident gardners."

Tulsi In Legends: According to one legend, Tulsi is also mentioned in the stories of Meera and of Radha immortalised in Jayadev's Gita Govinda. The story of Lord Krishna has it that when Krishna was weighed in gold, not even all the ornaments of Satyabhama could outweigh him. But a single tulsi leaf placed by Rukmani on the pan tilted the scale. In the Hindu stories, tulsi is very dear to Lord Vishnu. Tulsi is ceremonially married to Lord Vishnu annually on the 11th bright day of the month of Karttika in the lunar calendar. This festival continues for five days and concludes on the full moon day, which falls in mid October. This ritual, called the 'Tulsi Vivaha' inaugurates the annual marriage season in India.

(source: **http://hinduism.about.com/religion/hinduism/library/weekly/aa062000a.htm**).

Top of Page

Conclusion:

So long as this land,
Will have mountains, forests and pastures
That long will the Earth survive,
Sustaining you and the coming generations.

- **Devistotra. A Hindu Shastra**



Harmony with nature is an important aspect of Indian culture. The mountains, rivers, trees, flowers and animals have a special significance in Indian life. There is no mountain range in India from the



Himalayas to Sahyadri which is not somehow integrated with Indian life. The Himalaya is the devatatma and the mount Kailasa is the abode of Shiva. The Vindhyas are also sacred; the Aravaliis with Mount Abu and Amba Devi are centers of pilgrimage. When we come to the rivers, it is not only the Ganga and Yamuna that are sacred, but Narmada, Godavari, Kaveri and others are also holy. To each locality its river is sacred as Ganga. The Peepal, Banian, Neem trees, Tulasi etc., are also the useful part of our life. **In fact the Hindu culture, like the Hindu temple, is permeated with reverence for nature.** It is the harmony of man and nature that is the basic concept of our life and culture.

What is needed today is to remind ourselves that nature cannot be destroyed without mankind ultimately being destroyed itself. Centuries of rapacious exploitation of the environment has finally caught up with us, and a radically changed attitude towards nature, is now not a question of spiritual merit or condescension, but of sheer survival. This earth, so touchingly looked upon in the Hindu view as the Universal Mother, has nurtured mankind up from the slime of the primeval ocean for billions of years.

Let us recall the ancient Hindu dictum:

"**The earth is our mother, we are all her children."** Mountains are mystical realms of Gods, heaven and spiritual masters. Trees and termites, all of Nature has been venerated by ancient Hindus, Greeks, Native Americans and other Pagan religions around the world. They worshipped Nature and to treat the forces of Nature as heavenly superhuman powers. Zeus, Apollo the Sun god, has his own attending ministers; Minerva, the Goddess of wisdom, a western Saraswati, for whom learning springs from the head of love."

" God sleeps in the rocks, proclaims the Hindu scriptures, "dreams in the plants, stirs toward wakefulness in the animals, and in mankind is awake to his own ego individuality. "

" Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam -- The Whole Universe is one Family. "

Top of Page

Articles

"... A new age person expropriating, regurgitating Indic thought about god as his own, carefully omitting to indicate the source of his great new wisdom, the Indic heritage. This sort of expropriation is going on all over the place, e.g. in 'Christian' yoga, in the patenting of neem and turmeric, etc. Reminds me of Microsoft's mantra: 'embrace, extend, exterminate.'"

– **Rajeev Srinivasan**, Indic Journalists' web-posting dt. August 10, 2003.

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'West has always benefited from Indian medicine'

PANAJI: If you thought the benefits of medicine flowed into India via a one-way street, American researcher Timothy Walker would like to convince you that is not the case. This researcher of early European colonial history is currently scouring the archives of Goa to show how Indian medicine influenced the West.

"Indian medicine's influence on Portugal was fairly wide. You had echoes of Indian or ayurvedic practices that come into Portuguese usage. And you can see those echoes reflected in the medicines that Portuguese physicians and surgeons are supplying and prescribing for patients in Indian hospitals and infirmaries," Walker said.

What got him particularly interested is the differences between "popular" and "university trained" medicine. "For my doctoral program, I focused on early modern Europe and colonial America. My dissertation work was on Portugal in the 17th and 18th century. I looked at how popular medicine was being oppressed by licensed physicians and surgeons," he says.

In turn, he got led to India "because at that time a lot of the medicines coming out of India were being shipped to Portugal." Finally, he began looking how Indian medicine influenced European medicine, via Portugal - the earliest European colonial power in Asia.

Goa has one of the richest archives of early colonial history, because the Portuguese settled here in the early 16th century. Walker is locating interesting examples of drugs that were shipped out to Portugal in early colonial times.

Indian influences are also noticeable in drugs in Portuguese pharmacies. "You can see it (the influence of Indian medicine on the west) thorough documentation from the 17th and 18th century," says Walker.

Tamarind, for example, is a plant widely used in ayurveda. It is applied in Portuguese hospitals. It is used as a cooling agent, in combination with other medicinal plants to help the absorption of those plants and it is used in a poultice, placed on the skin.

Early Portuguese colonies in India proved to be the first meeting grounds for the east and the west, particularly Goa and the enclaves of Daman and Diu around the coastline of present day Gujarat, he says.

There's a lot of scholarship in the west that speaks of the way Western medicine was brought to the east, and of how 'scientific' medicine was taught to Indian people. But what is often not so strongly appreciated is how much the West learnt from the east," he points out.

Walker says he has been able to locate documents that show the extent of Portuguese buying medicines from local merchants and traders. "So you have a lot of opportunities for shared medical knowledge, which I don't think was the same case with other colonial powers that were in India at the time.

"In terms of documentation, you have a real gem here in Panjim. He points out there were 12,000 to 15,000 volumes of material that relatively are in very good condition. It has been well preserved and well catalogued.

"This probably is the best source of documentation for people who want to look at this whole question of the West meeting the east specially in the early stages." (IANS).

(source: http://www.timesofindia.com/300501/30indi34.htm)

Top of Page

Ashwagandha next on patent hunters list
http://www.timesofindia.com/today/16home7.htm

HYDERABAD: **Neem. Turmeric. Now, Ashwagandha. American and Japanese companies have discovered another Indian treasure -- and they are patenting it.**

According to the officials of the department of science and technology, seven American and four Japanese firms have filed for grant of patents on formulations containing Ashwagandha or extracts of the plant.

Fruits, leaves and seeds of the Indian medicinal plant *withania somnifera* have been used for ages in the Ayurvedic system as aphrodisiacs, diuretics and for restoring loss of memory, the officials said.

The Japanese patent applications are related to the use of Ashwagandha as a skin ointment for cosmetic purposes and for promoting fertility. Natreon of the United States has obtained a patent for "an extract obtained from the Ashwagandha plant taken from steep rocks in the Himalayan mountains", officials of the patent

facilitating cell said in their report.

The report said another US establishment, the New England Deaconess Hospital, has taken a patent on an Ashwagandha formulation claimed to "alleviate symptoms associated with arthritis".

"One thing which is very obvious from the above study," the report concluded, "is that Ashwagandha plant is catching attention of scientists and more and more patents related to Ashwagandha are being filed or granted by different patent offices of the world since 1996." *(PTI)*

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Abduction of Turmeric - Pirates in the garden of India

The war began thus: In May, 1995 the US Patent Office granted to the University of Mississippi Medical Center a patent [#5,401,504] for "Use of Turmeric in Wound Healing."





Well, well, well. Some discovery, that. Indians grow up with a constant awareness of turmeric. It permeates their life. It is an easy and generous plant [curcurma longa] that grows throughout the sub-continent. The tuber when dried keeps practically forever. Its decoction is a stubborn dye. It is a condiment that adds character to Indian food and helps digestion. Turmeric powder heals open wounds. Drunk with warm milk, it stems coughs, cures colds and comforts throats.

Indians paint doorways with turmeric paste as an insecticide. Women in the south make a depilatory skin cream with it. Add the juice of fresh lime to dry turmeric, let it marinate for three days, dry it in the sun and grind it to a fine powder and voila, you have the brilliant red kunkum that 'dots' Indian women's foreheads and surrounds the gods in the temples. Roots are exchanged between people as a formal symbol of goodwill. Indians place freshly uprooted plants at the altar during Pongal and offer worship .

For Indians turmeric is a benevolent goddess. For sound reasons, it transpires. Indian physicians had always packed their kits with turmeric. Now West's formal research was confirming many of its virtues. It is now believed to be able to treat dysentery, arthritis, ulcers and even some cancers. It is also found to protect the liver. Turmeric's grace is stunning cancer researchers. COX-2 inhibitor drugs have been known to block an enzyme called cyclooxygenase-2 which aggravates arthritis. Dr. Mitch Gaynor at the Strang Cancer Prevention Center, New York uses these drugs in cancer treatment to impede this undesirable enzyme. Turmeric goes one step further: Dr. Chintalapally V. Rao of American Health Foundation, Valhalla, NY believes that while COX-2 inhibitor drugs battle the enzyme, the curcumin element in turmeric prevents even the formation of the enzyme. Consider the implication of 'turmeric patent' #5,401,504. If an expatriate Indian in America sprinkles turmeric powder -- just as her ancestors in India have done for centuries-- on her child's scrape, she would in fact be infringing US patent laws and was open to prosecution.

(source: **Goodnewsindia.com**).

Curry Spice May Inhibit Tumor Growth A compound found in the curry spice turmeric may suppress production of a protein that spurs tumor growth in the body, researchers report. The researchers mixed human pancreatic cancer cells with different amounts of curcumin, which is the substance that gives turmeric its yellow color.

(source: **Yahoo News.com**).

Countries like India, where turmeric consumption is high, happen to have less cystic fibrosis, because that genetic defect is most common in people of European descent. Curcumin has no genetic effect. Eating large doses of a substance found in the spice turmeric significantly cut deaths among mice with the genetic disease, and scientists soon will begin studying the effects in people.

(source: **Turmeric Spice Substance May Fight Cystic Fibrosis - newsyahoo.com**).

The hot Indian curries that account largely to the over £3 billion a year turnover of the Indian food industry in Britain guard against the deterioration of human brain, according to the latest scientific finding. It also has a role in "encouraging" a lucid old age.

This is why it is being now said that India, which produces and consumes most of the world's turmeric, a chemical compound in the curry ingredient curcumin, **has lower rates of Alzheimer's than in western countries,** dropping to just one per cent of over-65s in some areas. A study into the health benefits of curcumin, which is found in kormas, hot or mild, has now confirmed that it protects against the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Scientists have discovered that curcumin oil is a chemical trigger that enhances enzyme activity. It in turn protects the brain against the progression of neuro-degenerative disease. . "There are 9000 curry houses in the country and London has more Indian eating places than in Mumbai or New Delhi.

(source: **Turmeric is new wonder drug - msn.co.in**).

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Victory for India: Neem patent revoked

The European Patent Office has upheld the revocation of a patent on the Indian 'neem' tree, dealing a killer blow to biopiracy in Europe and around the world.

The EPO originally issued the patent to the US chemicals multinational W R Grace on September 14, 1994, before withdrawing it under pressure from the Green Group led by former Belgian Health Minister Magda Alevoet, and **environmental activists Vandana Shiva** and International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (Germany) vice-president Linda Bullard on May 10, 2000 on grounds that W R Grace's application was a kind of **biopiracy**.

The dispute started more than 15 years ago on December 12, 1990 when W R Grace and the US government filed a European patent application for the 'neem' tree with the EPO. Commenting on EPO's decision, Alevoet told Belgian daily *Le Soil* on Thursday: "It is a victory for traditional knowledge and practices."

"This is the first time anybody has been able to have a patent rejected on these grounds. **Secondly, it is a victory for solidarity with the people of developing countries who have definitely earned the sovereign rights to their natural resources," she said.**

(source: **Victory for India: Neem patent revoked - rediff.com).**

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Hundreds of herbs used for centuries by traditional healers in India could soon be on western pharmacy shelves. Clinical trials have shown that herbal remedies for asthma, diabetes and even sexually transmitted diseases may be effective. The council is looking at treatments for a range of other conditions used for over a thousand years by practitioners of Ayurveda and Siddha medicine.

Professor Ranjit Roy Chaudhury, a member of the council, said that in some cases the herbs may be more effective than Western-style medicines. "We have plants for bronchial asthma, hepatitis and arthritis," he said.

(source: **Doctors investigate Indian herbs** - BBC - Sept 30 2002).

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Curry leaf for treating diabetes

The curry-leaf tree (Murraya koenigii) from India, which is reputed to have potential benefits in treating diabetes. The researchers found extracts from the curry-leaf tree appeared to restrict the action of a digestive enzyme called pancreatic alpha-amylase which is involved in the breakdown of dietary starch to glucose.

So now under the guise of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), India's traditional medical systems are being mined by researchers in the West. They are discovering "scientific evidence" that validates traditional claims.

And, increasingly, it turns out to be the first step towards exploitation by multinational pharmaceutical companies.

This week, researchers at King's College, London, claimed that the curry-leaf (Murraya Koenigii), which is traditionally used in both Ayurveda and Indian cuisine could aid people with diabetes.

Professor Peter Houghton, head of the research team, said: "The curry-leaf is used to control diabetes in traditional Indian medicine; it is not an uncommon ingredient in some curries and it is quite possible that people who take this regularly as part of their diet could control diabetes. He added: "Any food which has this curry-leaf in could be helpful to people with diabetes."

The research is being supported by a leading US drug company, Merck Research Laboratories.

Meanwhile Indolink has learned that S. Yadav and colleagues at the All India Institute of Medical Science have found up to 21 percent reduction in blood sugar levels in diabetic rats treated with curry leaf extract. Similarly, M.S.Baliga and colleagues at Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, have found that spices such as curry leaf might be "potent and novel therapeutic agents for the regulation of pathological conditions."

(source: **Curry leaf for treating diabetes** and **http://www.indolink.com/SciTech/fr093004-082744.php**).

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India Losing on Patents ?

Indraprasth, Dec 8 (UNI) - **After Neem, turmeric and jamun, now it is cow's urine, traditionally used for medicinal purposes in India, which has been patented in the United States as a distilled bio-enhancer.**

The government was aware of this fact and was considering the steps to be taken in this regard, official sources said here.

Cow's urine is a component of 'Panch Gawya,' a mixture of cow's milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung, used from ancient times as a component of food and medicine. It is also used in various ayurvedic medicines.

Though there was no separate strategy for popularizing use of Panch Gawya, it was being popularised as part of the popularisation of the Indian System of Medicine and Health medicines, they said. Now with the patenting of Cow's urine has confirmed the belief of naturopaths that it has got medicinal properties which enhances the life span. Former Prime Minister Morarji Desai was among the staunch supporters of cow' urine.

Earlier, the patenting of turmeric and neem in the US had created a furore in the country as people protested the patenting of traditional Indian knowledge abroad.

Recently, the **Jamun fruits that has been widely used in the Indian system for treatment of diabetes, has been patented in the US.**

(source: **Cow's urine patented in US as bio-enhancer - The Hindu** December 6' 02).

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Monsanto's chapati patent raises Indian ire

Monsanto, the world's largest genetically modified seed company, has been awarded patents on the wheat used for making chapati - the flat bread staple of northern India.

The patents give the US multinational exclusive ownership over Nap Hal, a strain of wheat whose gene sequence makes it particularly suited to producing crisp breads. Another patent, filed in Europe, gives Monsanto rights over the use of Nap Hal wheat to make chapatis, which consist of flour, water and salt.

Environmentalists say Nap Hal's qualities are the result of generations of farmers in India who spent years crossbreeding crops and collective, not corporate, efforts should be recognised. Greenpeace is attempting to block Monsanto's patent, accusing the company of "bio-piracy".

After the Basmati patent controversy, it is now the turn of Indian wheat, which the US agro produce major Monsanto is attempting to register under its patent name in Europe, where the wheat had once become so popular that it had won first prize for four consecutive years between 1916 and 1920.

The Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, an NGO, has moved the Supreme Court alleging that the Centre had failed to take the matter vigorously with the European Patent Office (EPO), and sought a direction to the government to take necessary action. The NGO has accused Monsanto of "blatant violation" of patent system while filing a claim before the EPO. **It said the Indian wheat variety had originated in the Indian sub-continent as a result of over a thousand years of "indigenous" knowledge and practice by the farmers. Any intervention by an outside entity to claim patent of the produce, was violative of the World Trade Organisation norms.**

(source: **Monsanto's chapati patent raises Indian ire - ** guardian.co.uk and **After Basmati, it's now the turn of wheat-** tribuneindia.com).

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Now, a US patent for atta chakkis

Patent relates to method of producing flour used for rotis

New Delhi, December 9: Now it is the turn of *atta chakkis*. The traditional knowledge of producing atta has become a victim of the patent rights regime. Hundreds of *atta chakkis* and modern flour millers and wheat exporters may fall into the trap being laid by a Nebraska-based company, ConAgra.

The US Patent Office has granted patent rights to ConAgra Inc for the "method for producing an atta flour" vide no 6,098,905.

The patent application filed by ConAgra said "the present invention relates to a method for producing an *atta* flour, which is typically used to produce Asian breads such as *chapati* and *roti*. Deputy DG of ICAR, Dr Mangla Rai, said that not only **attempts should be made to document and preserve our traditional knowledge but also we should make innovations on the basis of our traditional knowledge and patent the same.**

Dr O. P. Agarwal, advisor and head of R&D, CSIR said, "The filing of such patents rights by foreign companies should be a wake-up call for us to not only go for documentation of our traditional knowledge on a war footing but also to immediately identify areas of traditional knowledge which are likely to fall as an easy prey to piracy in a fast growing industrial economy."

(source: **Now, a US patent for atta chakkis - ** Indian Express December 8 '02).

Top of Page

The Mahakumbh: Its Sacred Significance
By Pankaj Dixit
http://www.timesofindia.com/today/20edit5.htm

WATER is the basis of all life on earth. Of the Panchmahabhut or the five natural elements, water is considered to be the key to life. Human beings feel a close affinity to it, since three-fourths of the human body is constituted of water. In this respect, our body is like a microcosm, as the surface of the earth (the macrocosm) is constituted similarly, being three-fourths, water.

The confluence of three rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati at Prayag stands for the meeting of Ida, Pingala and Sushumna Nadis at Muladhar Chakra known as Yukta Triveni. Kumbha symbolises the arousing of six chakras to reach Ajna Chakra where these three nadis meet again to form the Mukta (Liberation) Triveni for yogis.



The Ganga always flows and rushes very fast to the sound of Gama-Gam (meaning go-go) while the Yamuna moves slowly with a placid flow to the sound of Yam-Yam (meaning control-control). Likewise whether one acts fast in life or acts after deliberate thinking, it must be decided by his knowledge and temperament. And both these aspects should be supported by the invisible Saraswati, the faculty of Jnan (knowledge). The meeting of these three rivers in the spiritual realm represents the three gunas or qualities of the native, i.e. Sattvic or subtle represented by Saraswati; Rajasic or the vibrant Ganga; and Tamasic or the dark Yamuna. These three rivers also signify the three saktis, Mahalakshmi, Mahakali and Mahasaraswati; the three sacred fires of sacrifice; the three Gods Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh; and the three notes of music, Sa for Saraswati; Re for Yamuna; and Ga for Ganga.

Further deep in the spiritual sphere, these three rivers represent the three phases of time i.e. present, past and future; the triangle or minimum space enclosed in time; Nad, Bindu and Kala; and the three humours, vata, pitta and kapha. The Triveni also denotes the three basic philosophies of the Gita, i.e. Jnan Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga.

The Kumbha occurs in a cycle of every 12 years - the most sacred or auspicious time is calculated on the basis of a specific planetary configuration, considering its cosmobiological effect on the human body and mind. Various astronomical conjugations during Kumbha represent various stages of the solar cycle which has a direct influence on human beings and the biosphere. The ritual bath or snan on specific days i.e. full moon, new moon and Basant Panchami have been specifically prescribed on the basis of the bio-effects of lunar phases. The imposed electromagnetic fields on water are transmitted into the human beings taking bath in the Holy Prayag giving them great health benefits. The number 12 here signifies time or Kal as there are 12 adityas, 12 zodiac signs, 12 months, and 12 Jyotirlingas (self-emergent sivalingas). The entire world exists in time, moves in time and space, and is controlled by time. According to Atharvaveda, Kumbh is the representation of space situated in Kal supervising all of us. Spiritually the holding of Kumbha at an interval of 12 years symbolises the need for purifying the body by sublimating the inherent vices of the 12 sense organs, i.e. Panchkarmendriyas (five organs of action), Panchjnanedriyas (five organs of perception, the mind and the intellect - and thereby to arouse the six psychic centres or chakras separated from each other at a distance of 12 angulas for attaining the Amrit Kumbha or pitcher of nectar.



There is another mystical explanation of the Kumbha. The human head and neck form an inverted pitcher or Kumbha from where Amrit or nectar flows downwards into the body. The two eyes represent the sun and moon gods, the nostrils represent Ganga and Jamuna, the tongue is Vani or Saraswati and it spans 12 angulas of space.

Astrologically during Kumbha the three grahas, Jupiter, Sun and Moon, play a prominent role in the two Zodiac signs, Taurus and Capricorn respectively. The presence of Sun in Capricorn or Makara signifies the Swadhishtan Chakra, the centre of procreation representing the water element. Makara also signifies the Kama as Kamdev, popularly knows as Makaradhwaj. Accordingly Madam Blavatsky in her famous book Sacred Doctrine records that Capricorn is universal intelligence, which is transformed into human intelligence through water. It is therefore that one of the famous **Shahi Snans** occurs on Basant Panchami, the day of Kamdev. Likewise Jupiter's or Jiva's (life force) presence in Taurus signifies the creative power of universe, Shiva Shakti or the Male and female forces.

Top of Page

Trees with spiritual attributes
Pran Nevile
http://www.tribuneindia.com/20011021/spectrum/main5.htm

From time immemorial, certain trees and plants in India have been invested with divine attributes. Hindus were taught to worship and revere trees and plants in the belief that it would influence their own personal well-being.

Evergreen trees were regarded as symbols of eternal life and to cut them down was to invite the wrath of the gods. Groves in forests were looked upon as habitations of the gods.

The banyan tree occupies the pride of place amongst the sacred trees of India. It has aerial roots that grow down into the soil forming additional trunks. It is, therefore, called *bahupada*, the one with several feet. It symbolizes a long life and also represents the divine creator, Brahma. It is invariably planted in front of temples. The numerous stems of the banyan tree are even regarded as the home of gods and spirits. It was under a banyan tree that the Hindu sages sat in a trance seeking enlightenment and it was here that they held discourses and conducted holy rituals. Some banyan trees reached a height of over 100 feet and more than 1000 feet in circumference. No wonder, it is stated that 10,000 men could be covered by a single tree. We come across a mention of the banyan tree in many travelers' accounts.

Bishop Heber (1825) was so impressed by the sight of this tree that he exclaimed: **"What a noble place of worship". Travelers' tales even inspired the great English poet Milton to give description of the banyan tree in Paradise Lost in the following lines.**

The fig-tree at this day to Indians known
In Malabar or Deccan, spreads her arms,
Branching so broad and long, that on the ground
The bended twigs take root, and daughters grow
About the mother tree, a pillar'd shade,
High over-arched and echoing walks between."

In Hindu mythology, the tree is called *Kalpavriksha*, the tree that provides fulfillment of wishes and other material gains. The worship of the tree is also represented in a Buddhist sculpture with its long hanging roots dropping gold pieces in vessels placed below.

Another great tree of India is the *peepul* to be found all over the country. **Known for its antiquity, it finds a mention in many Hindu scriptures as a sacred tree whose worship is regarded as homage to the Trinity — Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.** The tree is treated as a Brahmin and special offerings made to it in the morning and lamps lit there in the evening. The tree is also associated with the old *vedic* ritual of lighting a sacrificial fire with a twig of the peepul tree.



Indian women engaged in the ceremony of tree worship by William Carpenter, Rajpootana C.1850 (courtesy V&A Museum, London).

Even now, village women may be seen worshipping the tree by watering its roots and placing some milk and eats for the serpents and insects residing there. Every village has its special *peepul* tree and the village elders hold their councils beneath its hallowed foliage. The most famous of these trees is the sacred *peepul* at Gaya under which Buddha sat when he attained Enlightenment. Since then the *peepul* tree is also called the *Bo* or the *Bodhi* tree and Prince Sidharath came to be known as Buddha. It is also believed to be a symbol of fertility and women worship it for progeny. The tree waves its leaves in an uncanny way and their trembling with a fluttering sound is attributed to spirits agitating in each leaf. This puts fear of the gods into the hearts of common folk.

The banyan and the *peepul* trees are symbols of the male and ceremoniously married to those of the female category. **James Forbes**, in his **Oriental Memoirs** (1813), mentions about a wedded banyan tree or the Palmyra and Burr tree united, that he saw at Salsette.

The *bilva* or oak-apple and the *Asoka* trees are associated with different deities. The Asoka tree is sacred to Kama, the god of love, and according to folklore, its buds will open up in full bloom when the foot of a young beautiful maiden touches its roots. The *bilva* with its three leaves resembling the *trishul*, or the trident held by

Lord Shiva finds mention in Hindu mythology. Its fruit is a blood purifier.

Besides the sacred trees, there are some sacred plants, notably the *tulsi* plant which is found everywhere in sandy and fallow lands. It is an ancient variety of the basil. *tulsi* is considered to be the wife of Vishnu and worshipped by the Hindus. In homes, *tulsi* is grown in pots and womenfolk offer daily *puja* and pour an oblation of Ganges water. A mere touch of the plant is believed to purify the person and giving a twig of *tulsi* to anyone is considered as a protection from dangers and difficulties. *Tulsi* leaves are also put in the mouth of a dying man for the salvation of the soul. Among other virtues of the *tulsi* are its medicinal properties. Its leaves have a pleasing aroma and act as a cough elixir and cordial. Leaves are also eaten to help digestion and prevent other maladies like cold and chill. No wonder, the Hindus deified the plant for its numerous qualities.

Darbha or *kusha* is a sacred grass essential in all sacrifices. This plant is found in damp marshy ground. It is rough to the touch and pointed at the top. According to an old legend, it was produced at the time of the churning of the ocean by the gods and demons. It is also said that the gods while drinking *amrita* or the nectar of immortality shed some drops on this grass which thus became sacred.

There is a mention of it in the Hindu scriptures and the epics. The *Kusha* grass is therefore worshipped by Brahmins and used in various religious ceremonies as it is believed to have the virtue of purifying everything.

Top of Page

Patent Your Heritage

Globalization has made it easier for companies in wealthy countries to take advantage of poor countries by filing patents for crops, medicines and chemicals that traditional cultures have been cultivating and using for centuries. This year, the poor countries have figured out a way to fight back: they are creating digital libraries for their ancient cultural knowledge.

India, probably the largest victim, is cataloging its traditional knowledge on a protected Web site and on DVD's it will send to patent examiners worldwide. The next time someone proposes patenting the use of a traditional Indian herb or spice for a particular medicinal purpose, examiners will be able to see if Indian Ayurvedic medicine described the process centuries ago.

In June, the United Nations' World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) unveiled a Web site with parts of the Indian digital library, as well as a database of patents based on traditional medicine granted in Beijing to Chinese inventors. WIPO is urging other countries to catalog their cultural and biological patrimony, and is asking patent examiners to search these databases when considering relevant applications.

India began the project after it had to spend almost four years fighting a basmati rice patent granted in America to a company called RiceTec, and two years to get another American patent, on the healing properties of turmeric, revoked. "There are 2,000 or 3,000 cases of misappropriation of our traditional knowledge in Washington alone," says V. K. Gupta, the driving force behind India's digital database. "It would cost us a billion dollars to invalidate these wrong patents in court. We needed defensive protection."

The United States patent office, not surprisingly, sees its mission as encouraging innovation through the generous granting of patents, and those who disagree can slug it out before a judge. Woefully overstretched examiners have only a few hours to see whether an idea is new, and they cannot reject a patent application on common sense alone. "Patent offices have terrible problems knowing who's doing what where, especially outside their home countries," says Greg Aharonian, a San Francisco patent consultant. And traditional knowledge -- which often exists only orally -- is especially hard to pin down.

Ayurvedic medicine is written -- in verse. The Indian database translates the verses from Sanskrit to modern languages, updating the names of plants and diseases and grouping them into standard patent classifications. Digital libraries for other Indian traditional medicines are in the works.

(source: **Patent Your Heritage** - http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/15/magazine/15PATE.html).

Top of Page

Religious Conversion threatening India's ecological heritage

The ecological traditions of India, especially Kerala face serious threat in the form of religious conversion, according to noted environmental scientists, technologists and ecologists. This was revealed here on Wednesday by none other than Dr Nanditha Krishna, Chairperson, C P Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation.

Delivering the introductory speech of the seminar on " Conservation of Ecological Traditions and Sacred Sites of India", with special emphasis on Kerala, Dr Nanditha pointed out that religious conversion happening all over the country at an alarming rate has destroyed forests and holy groves (popularly known as Kaavus in Kerala). **"The proselityzers and the newly converts do not have any emotional attachments with the holy groves. In most of the cases, the newly converted people see to it that the holy groves are destroyed at the earliest,"** Dr Nanditha said. **She pointed out with statistics that many dense forests and groves in north east India became the main target of the Christian missionaries engaged in the harvesting of souls in the areas.**

Dr Nanditha said that the Kaavus, especially the sarppakaavus (fanily temples where the snakes were worshipped) were destroyed indiscriminately as a result of urbanization and religious conversion. "This is causing havoc all over the country. The team of scientists from the CRP Foundation found to their dismay that Kerala, popularly known as God's Own Country, is fast emerging as a drought stricken state. The new generation among the Hindus show scant regard to the traditional Kaavus and groves," Dr Nanditha said.

Substantiating the findings of the CRP Foundation team were the revelations by Shri M Amrithalingam, a well known botanist and ecologist. Shri Amrithalingam, with more than two decades of research experience in the ecological system of south India told the seminar that unless and other wise something is done to arrest the destruction of the holy groves, the country is in for serious crises, like drought and shortage of water.

"While we had small sized forests attached to the Hindu tharavadus in Kerala, urbanization and religious conversion have denuded them. There were many scientific reasons for worshipping forests, animals and groves," Amrithalingam explained.

Shri T Madhava Menon, formerly of the Indian Administrative Service spoke on the Tribal Communities and Heritages of Kerala. Dr C R Rajagopalan, Dr S Rajasekharan, Shri E Unnikrishnan, Dr K P Thrivikramji and Dr Ashalatha Thampuran presented papers on the various aspects of ecology and environment.

Earlier, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, noted film maker who inaugurated the seminar expressed apprehension over the findings of the CPR Foundation. More than hundred college students from various parts of the state attended the seminar.

(source: **Haindava Kerala Correspondent - THIRUVANANTHAPURAM).** For more refer to chapter on **Conversion.**

Top of Page

American firm has surreptitiously patented Jeevani
An Indian herbal formulation with regenerative properties.



While all attention is riveted on the furore over **CPI(M) The Communist Party of India-Marxist leader Brinda Karat's diabolical attempt to denigrate and discredit Ayurveda and Ayurvedic drugs** which together are rapidly gaining popularity and posing a challenge to multinational drug companies, **few would have noticed that an American firm has surreptitiously patented Jeevani, an Indian herbal formulation with regenerative properties.**

The Kani tribe of Kerala had harnessed native knowledge and used indigenous plants to create this wonder diet supplement. Subsequently, Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute, in collaboration with the tribe, had developed Jeevani as a packaged product. That was nearly a decade ago. Although a local patent was procured, nobody bothered to take

note of patent laws that have come into force in the post-WTO era.

The American firm, **Good Earth Companies Inc**, has made full use of this lapse and, after patenting the brand, released its own product labelled as 'Jeevani Jolt 1000' whose ingredients are the same as those in the original Indian formulation.

Technically, Good Earth has not violated any law. Given the smash-and-grab attitude of American enterprise, it would be silly to expect any US firm to be guided by ethics. If anybody is to blame, it is the sprawling bureaucracy of India which is too slothful to respond to the changing times. By the time a file makes its way from one desk to another in its inexorable journey through the hierarchy of India's babudom, someone somewhere would have outwitted those charged with - and paid by taxpayers - to protect India's interests.

We have seen this happening in the past with Neem, Haldi and Basmati being patented and our babudom waking up from their paid-for-slumber with a start only after reports appeared in the media. This time, too, we can expect our bureaucrats to feign ignorance and their political bosses to voice faux indignation.

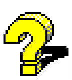
There are other reasons, too, why we continue to lose out on indigenous medicines, often to foreign firms. To begin with, Indian systems of medicine are poorly documented. Modern medicine demands proof on the efficacy of a particular formulation, which is most often not documented in the case of traditional drugs. The Government's effort to overcome this obstacle through a partnership between CSIR, ICMR and Department of Ayush is welcome, but the pace is far too slow to merit any applause.

Moreover, the marketing of indigenous medicines is poor. A last point: Indigenous systems have not cultivated a culture of quality control as is understood in the context of modern, consumer-driven markets.

We need to introduce standardisation across industry. The State drug controller's establishment does not have the expertise to check Ayurvedic samples. The Government is at last talking about creating the post of an additional director-general in the proposed National Drug Authority and four AYUSH inspectors. But given the snail's pace at which Government works, and the pro-active campaign by MNCs to prevent the emergence of indigenous medicines as a challenger to their hegemony, adequately backed by the campaign of calumny launched by their stooges in the Left, we can only wait for all this to happen.

(source: **Our loss, US's gain - The Pioneer Edit Desk** - Jan 7' 2006).

Top of Page



Did you Know?

Sissa's request and Chess

Among the fascinating legends told about the origin of chess is the story of Sissa, a scientist and the inventor of the game. In western India, Raja Balhait had asked his advisers to create a game that demonstrated the values of prudence, diligence, foresight, and knowledge. Sissa brought a chessboard to the raja and explained that he had chosen war as a model for the game because war was the most effective school in which to learn the values of decision, vigor, endurance, circumspection, and courage. The raja was delighted with the game and ordered its preservation in temples. He considered its principles the foundation of all justice and held it to be the best training in the art of war.



The raja said to his subject Sissa, "Ask any reward. It will be yours." Being a scientist, Sissa felt rewarded by the pleasure his invention was giving others; but the kind insisted, and finally Sissa said, "Give me a reward in grains of corn on the chessboard (ashtapada). On the first square one grain, on the second two, on the third four, on the fourth double of that, and so on until the 64th and last square."

The raja would not hear of it. He insisted that Sissa ask for something of more worth than grains of corn. But Sissa insisted he had no need of much and that the grains of corn would suffice. Thereupon the raja ordered the corn to be brought; but before they had reached the 30th square, all the corn of India was exhausted. Perturbed, he looked at



Sissa, who laughed and told his raja that he knew perfectly well he could never receive the reward he had asked because the amount of corn involved would cover the whole surface of the earth to a depth of nine inches.

The raja did not know which to admire more: the invention of chess or the ingenuity of Sissa's request. The number involved is 18,446,744,073,709,551,615 grains. This number had been previously calculated by the early Indian mathematicians, who incidentally, had invented the decimal system long before it reached the Arabs and Europe.

(source: **Feast of India: A Legacy of Recipes and Fables - By Rani** p. 84).

Top of Page







Updated - September 7, 2005